WILD OATS

JAMES OPPENHEIM

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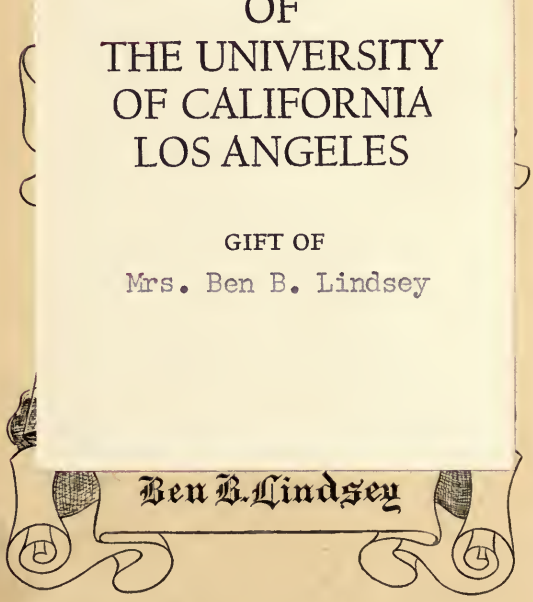

WILD OATS

By the same author:

"DR. RAST"

"MONDAY MORNING AND OTHER POEMS"

WILD OATS

By JAMES OPPENHEIM

With a Foreword by
EDWARD BOK

NEW YORK
B. W. HUEBSCH
1910

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Printed in U. S. A.

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A FOREWORD

This story by Mr. Oppenheim comes, perhaps, at the psychological moment to tell—let me hope to thousands—in the form of fiction what we must very soon face as an actual living question to be squarely met and dealt with. For the old saying that "the truth is stranger than fiction" is peculiarly true of this story. The fearful truth that lies back of this narrative cannot much longer remain in the background of the public conscience. We are slowly but surely awakening, in part, to a realizing sense that somewhere in the social body there is a festering sore that needs the surgery and cleansing process of the light of public discussion and extermination at the hands of decent people. It is not meeting the question to contend that it is not a "nice subject" or a "polite topic": neither did the ravages of tuberculosis make pleasant reading. And the

evil of "The Great White Plague" is comparatively as naught with the greater and more insidious evil that is being wrought by "The Great Black Plague," with its fearful results on innocent children. Mr. Oppenheim, with due reserve, gives a glimpse, and it is but a glimpse, of the burden we are laying upon the next generation by blinding not alone our own eyes to the death-dealing evil that lies at our very door, but the actual and pitiable blinding of the unborn and the newly-born.

It may be that the work of arousing the public conscience on the great evils that threaten the very foundations of our social structure, is in the hands of the fictionist. This has unquestionably been true in the past. If it be true of the present evil, may this story speak its great and vibrant message in clarion tones.

EDWARD BOK.

Philadelphia,
1910.

Wild Oats

CHAPTER I

SPRING ON EAST BROADWAY

SPRING on East Broadway. The air is winey, the heavens are radiant blue and full of fire. A sparrow chirps on the window-sill, fluttering before the milk-glass sign: "Doctor Rast." Down toward the East the wet pavement is golden with sun, and through the splendor wades an ancient people on their way to work. For it is early morning; early April; the waters of river and bay flash about that shining floating city of towers; and, though the great Earth is buried beneath paving stone and brick and steel and granite, her mighty yearning exhales through the cool white air, and four mil-

lion human beings are dazzled and smelted in the fires of Spring.

The big dark Doctor was shaving before a tiny wall-mirror over the kitchen wash tub. He was in shirt and trousers, and his face was white with lather. Nell had the oatmeal cooking on the hot stove, and glided here and there singing snatches of song. Her eager olive-tinted face was flushed, her brown eyes afire. The little boy David, now nearly three, tugged at her skirts.

"Mother! Mother! Mother!"

She swung him up in her arms and laughed in his beautiful face; for he was a rosy new boy-god, straight and breathing health, overrunning with virility.

"Well!" she shook him. "Well, Blinkers!"

"I'm not Blinkers—I'm Davy," he said indignantly.

"You're Blinkers!" she shook him again.

"I'm not—*you're* Blinkers!"

"Then give me a kiss."

"No—I can't love you."

"Whom do you love?"

"Daddy!"

The Doctor danced up and down with joy.

"Mother," he cried, "the boy has genius!"

"No, I haven't," said Davy, "I've got a new nose."

The Mother and Father laughed, and looked at each other.

"Where?" Nell gave him a squeeze.

"Here!" he delicately touched his nose with one finger.

"And where did you get it?"

"I bought it."

"Where?"

"I bought it in the store."

"With what?" cried the Doctor.

"A dollar," said Davy calmly.

"And who gave you a dollar, you rascal?"

"Mother gave me a dollar." The little imagination was set at work, and the little lips poured a wild stream of words, a breathless recitation: "I got a dollar and I went to the store and I said give me a new nose, and I gave the man a dollar and

he gave me a nose. Isn't that funny? And then I went to another store, and what do you think happened?"

"What?" cried his parents.

Three times he told his story, winding up, "Isn't that funny? And then I went to another store, and what do you think happened?"

Nell and the Doctor laughed till the tears came, for they were the Mother and the Father and only they shared the secret of the miracle.

Then Nell put the boy down, and while he capered with excitement, put a wooden bowl on a chair, filled it with cut vegetables, and gave him a chopper. He set to work with a will, chopping the vegetables, a tiny mite laboring like a man. He looked up.

"I'm a helper, Mother, I'm a helper!"

Nell whispered to the Doctor:

"Just watch!"

And they put their arms round each other, and leaned close, smiling:

"Look," said Nell, "he does it just as I

do—scrapes round the side and chops in toward the center. Isn't it wonderful?"

The Doctor sighed:

"And to think that he came to the world through us! That we had a hand in creating him! Pretty good work, Nell!"

The little fellow ran to the cupboard, obtained imaginary salt with his hand, and hurried back to sprinkle his hash. He could not contain himself for joy. He turned to his mother and cried in a wild treble music:

"Oh, I love you so much, I don't know what to do!"

The Doctor shouted; the young Mother snatched up her baby and hugged him to her heart.

Truly it was Springtime; joy was in the air, and new life; and the Earth had her way with the stone city. That little kitchen, with its shafts of bright light through the window, sang like a clearing in a wilderness. And even as the Earth enfolded with love and tenderness her young buds, her song-stricken birds, her singing waters,

even so this man and woman enfolded their living child.

"He is like a little bird," said the Doctor, "so full of song; so fresh; so sweet. And like a little blossom."

He went on and finished his dressing, and the boy toiled and sang aloud, and the Mother prepared breakfast. Then the Doctor touched Nell on her shoulder.

"Shall I tell you a secret, Mother?"

"Yes. What is it?"

He seized both her arms and looked in her face.

"Spring is here!"

They smiled at one another.

"What does it remind you of?" he went on.

"Us."

And then she whispered:

"I'm always full of yearning in the Spring. Remember the nights we used to walk together?"

"Moonlight nights!"

"Oh, I wish we were in love again!"

He smiled and drew her close.

"Let's be, then," he whispered. "Let's

have the old enchantment again—the old witchery. A kiss in secret—a walk through deserted streets—a quarrel—romance!"

"And let's elope!" she cried.

"Yes," he said with a grin, "but we'll be original, sweetheart. We'll take the boy with us!"

Whereupon they laughed, and the scene turned human again, and they sat and ate a hearty breakfast, and were glad that life was so full of commonplaces. For what more can a man ask than to eat breakfast with his wife and his son on a Spring morning?

Then, after breakfast, the Doctor felt too happy to work, so Davy was shoved into a coat and hat, and his father took him out into the street, and they went wandering together. The first breath of that cool pure air, the first sight of golden pave and clear blue sky, the first thrill of sun, changed the Doctor into a young boy. He and Davy babbled together like closest chums.

Many passing nodded to the Doctor. Old women in wigs and shawls, old men bearded and wrinkled, mothers leading

children, young men on the way to work, cheerily spoke a good morning and passed. The old-fashioned red street, with a horse-car passing, with the Educational Alliance lifting yellow opposite and a crowd of children lined up at the door, was beautiful to the Doctor. Every step was rich with associations, bloody almost with the life of the past. For the Doctor had been working in the Ghetto for years now; he had come down with his young wife to serve his own people—serve them not with drug and knife alone, but rather with understanding, with wisdom and with love. And so his name had gone out to thousands, his face in the doorway made the sick strong, his counsel was sought in matters of birth and of life and death. He was the best-loved man in the East Side.

And so, as he and Davy babbled together through the joyous morning, he was greeted by many as they passed. Suddenly a young voice cried:

"Good morning!"

The Doctor looked up. It was Edith Kroll, a girl of seventeen—young as the

morning. A faint flush was in her fresh cheeks, her blue eyes were full of soft light, her light brown hair went out in strands that fluttered in the stirring air. She was graceful, slim, exquisite, her little blue hat contrasting with the blue of her eyes. As she cried "good morning" her face was lit with soft laughter, and she leaned quickly and kissed Davy on the cheek.

Davy shrieked: "Don't do that!"

The Doctor laughed, and took her little cool hand in both of his.

"Well! Edith!" he cried. "Nun ya, how goes it?"

The girl's cheeks burned, and she looked down shyly.

"Oh," she said hastily, and withdrew her hand, "I was just going to stop in a moment."

His voice took on concern.

"Is anything the matter?"

"Nothing much," she murmured, "Mother isn't so well again. Do you want to go and see her?"

"Surely!" he said heartily, and snatched at Davy who was bound for the gutter.

"Well," he went on, "how are you?"

"Oh, I'm all right."

"And the job?"

"It's good." She looked up, smiling, "I got a raise last month."

"A raise!" he whistled, "why, splendid!"

"I'm getting twelve a week now."

He spoke tenderly:

"Edith, I'm glad. But I'm not surprised. All my girls are wonders!"

She flushed hotter with the praise, and her eyes shone as she looked down on the pavement and played with her hands.

The Doctor smiled softly:

"How you've changed, how you've grown! Tut, I'm getting to be an old man."

She looked up sharply:

"No, you're not!"

He groaned.

"But are you sure?"

"Yes," she cried "sure."

He murmured absently:

"I just wonder if Edith is in love."

She seemed startled and surprised:

"No! never!" she spoke vehemently "I'm never going to marry."

"Never?"

"Why should I?"

Again he spoke absently, his lips twitching with smiles:

"Davy, it's a habit girls have, isn't it? Wait, till she meets the right man, eh, Davy?"

Davy laughed knowingly, though he had to force himself to do it, and the sound resembled a cackle.

"See?" triumphed the Doctor.

But Edith only darted down and kissed the young fellow, cried a "good-by," and ran off laughing. The Doctor watched her lovingly as she swung down the block and round the corner, a graceful young girl, light on her feet as a faun, dancing over the April earth like a flame in the blue morning.

She hurried through the playground park. Just a hint of fresh green tipped the boughs of the glistening trees, and here and there in the branches blackbirds loosed

their dark raucous cries; sparrows crowded the walk where an old man was scattering bread crumbs; and troops of little children, laughing, chattering, walked and ran toward the big white public school. They seemed like human sparrows, or, rather, blackbirds and redbirds, overrunning with laughter and song. Higher rose the sun over the swarming city; the air was white haunted with gold; the heavens seemed to dream and yearn, they were so blue, and steeped in these mysterious fires the heart of the young girl seemed to empty with yearning. What she wanted she hardly knew. Was it to leave the city, and go out beyond the horizon into some enchanted wilderness? Did she long to sit at the side of some wild water and brood and dream? Or did she want people? Did she crave human words, human touch, human faces? No, she wanted something wilder, sweeter. How could she know that she was in the throes of adolescence, that she was awaking to sex, that hereafter there would be two miracles on Earth: man and woman? How could she know what the word love

meant as between girls and boys? The Doctor had whispered of marriage, but looking on the young men that passed, she saw no glamour. The Doctor was her ideal of a man—and these these were very unlike him.

Sweet Edith! Just seventeen—seventeen years in the heart of the deep city—and yet a simple and innocent and quiet life. Public school, shorthand school, the job in the clothing business—her few friends, her two brothers, her ailing mother. She had had a taste of theater; she had gone to night school; she sometimes attended a lecture, or a meeting of the people at Cooper Union. But thus far, though the wild city whirled like a cyclone about her, with its Broadway, its Bowery, its crime and commerce, its toil and struggle and tragi-comedy of millions of living people, Edith had lived in the quiet center of the storm, a life immured, innocent, and had grown naturally as flower unfolding from bud.

She was at the perilous age. From unconscious childhood she had emerged, and found that she, too, was a miracle—a hu-

man being capable of the depths and heights of life, packed with all sweet possibilities. All the world was new; a wonder was everywhere. Romance lurked in familiar corners, transfiguring them. Anything might break open in her heart now and sweep her with the passions that drive a life to divine heights or ruin it.

Sweet Edith! There she was that young Spring morning, living, breathing, hurrying through the crowds of children, innocent as they, fresh as a new wild-rose, light on her feet, and full of the yearning fire of the blue. Can't you see her, her little blue hat stuck with a black feather, her bending blue-eyed face, her lithe little body gracefully gliding through the cool air? Surely she was made for happiness, for motherhood and home, and all the quiet round of human life!

She turned into shining Grand Street; she walked down the street to a tall loft-building, entered, climbed a flight of stairs, and pushed open a door into the "factory." There in twilight were the garment-makers, stitching, cutting, and crazily

racing the machines. She passed through the hubbub to the front, opened a door of a partition, and stepped into the offices. There were four of these, partitioned from each other, and connected by doors. The center one was the show-room, with large oak-table, and racks. Two young men were chatting at the open window and gazing down at the street. Edith did not notice them, but passed into the adjoining office, took off hat and coat, opened the window, pulled the cover from the typewriter, and set to work busily cleaning the machine. The hum of the young men's voices reached her, but she paid no heed to their words.

The young men were chatting amiably. One of them was Frank Lasser, the new traveling salesman, territory Pennsylvania —a smartly dressed fellow, almost insolently handsome. He had large black eyes, a little brown mustache, and black hair smoothly plastered on a high forehead. His chin was weak. He spoke volubly and cynically. His companion was Jonas Zug, salesman for New York State, young, but

almost bald. As they talked trade and territory, a barrel organ in the street below loosed a wild waltz-music. The young men leaned out of the window. Four little school-girls had handed their books to others and were dancing in the center of an absorbed circle of people. They executed, not a waltz, but a wild street-dance, passionate, swift, their whole bodies playing rhythmically. One forgot tattered shoes and torn aprons and thin cheeks—so wild a magic was wrought by the dance. All the fresh glory of the morning, all the yearning and fire of the sun and the air, seemed to pulse through the world from them.

Zug spoke grimly:

"That's where the chorus girls come from, eh? My! but they dance!"

Frank laughed, and pointed:

"See that one with the red sweater? Ain't she a peach, though?"

She was a strange creature—a girl with fiery black eyes, glossy black hair flying wild. She danced with a weird fury, throwing back her head now and then,

shaking out her curls; her little feet flew, kicked, whirled; her thin arms and hands darted snakily, out, up, under. Something of the burning desert was in the face, something of the tropical in her motions; she seemed like the ominous fire-shot smoke-plume of a volcano. The crowd was fascinated, drawing closer; there was a queer feeling that mighty destinies hung on the dance; that it was leading *somewhere;* that it was moving toward some crisis.

Zug breathed fast and watched sharply. And then the music ceased and the girl stopped short. A noise of many voices went up about her.

"Gee!" said Frank, "in a few years that girl will be worth trapping."

Zug turned angrily, and raised his voice:

"Quit it, will you? Can't you think of anything else, Lasser?"

"Well, well!" Frank whistled. "We're getting virtuous in our old age, ain't we?"

Zug spoke with uncalled-for passion:

"I'm getting decent, Lasser, and you ——"

Frank laughed:

"So you've finished sowing your wild oats—Congratulations! Have you set the date?"

"What do you mean?"

Suddenly the air grew electric, as with two souls grappling in a death struggle. Frank was amazed, startled; but he spoke lightly.

"I mean, when's the wedding, eh?"

"Whose wedding?"

"Oh, come off," said Frank cynically, "how should I know her name."

"Whose name?"

"The lady's. Is she on the premises? Is she a sweatshop lady?"

Zug squared a fist, and his voice rose and rang with passion:

"Now, see here, Lasser, I say you'll cut this out. Understand?"

"Oh, that's it!" laughed Frank easily. "You've got it bad, Jonas."

Zug's voice rose higher, and he raised his fist:

"Damn you——"

Then, suddenly, he dropped his hand, and stood back, abashed, ashamed, his face

very pale. At the same moment a light delicate hand touched Frank's arm, and a low sweet voice quivered at his ear:

"You must both stop this—both."

Frank turned, and looked into Edith's face. The light of the blue eyes went into him, running after the music of the voice. He saw the lips quiver; he saw the wisps of light-brown hair; the wild-rose cheeks. Strength went out of him; cynicism left him. And then he heard Zug speaking in a low, humble voice:

"I didn't mean it, Miss Edith, I didn't mean it. I'm sorry—awfully sorry."

Edith spoke sadly:

"I'm sure you only forgot yourself, Mr. Zug."

And she was gone—vanishing like a startled fawn.

Truly it was the Springtime—and Earth was yearning as she enfolded her creatures with strength and love; the air was cool; the heavens utterly blue; and the fires touched a heart here and there and woke it to dream and mystery and wild enchantment. Frank Lasser was young in years,

but far from the pure beauty of this world. He did not know girls of this type. As he stood helpless, he felt as if a new Power was clutching at his heart.

And then he looked at Zug and saw a remorseful face and tear-stained eyes—a man stricken down.

"Oh," he murmured, "I see! I see!"

CHAPTER II

THE MOTHER

DOCTOR RAST didn't get around to see Mrs. Kroll till late that afternoon. The enchantment of the morning proved to be but a promise of Spring—a promise unfulfilled. Clouds engulfed the city, darkening the streets. The wind blew wild, scattering dust. People hurried; pedlars raced their pushcarts along; windows were slammed shut. There was something ominous in the air, a momentary expectation of rain and storm.

The Doctor could not help feeling the power of the weather—how the human race is driven before the changing atmosphere. A blue morning shakes out four million people exultant and daring; a black afternoon sweeps them shivering home. He himself felt the tragedy of the day—the

sweet bubbling April broken and ruined. Full of these thoughts, as he passed the gas-lit shops of Clinton Street, he paused and entered a draughty hall and climbed two dark flights of stairs.

He knocked in front, and getting no answer, tried the door. It was unlocked. A gust of air blew in with him. He stepped through the dark kitchen, through a dark inner room to the open doorway of another. As he stood a moment he could see the window of the parlor in front gray and dim, and suddenly lashed with rain.

"May I come in?" he said softly.

"Ach, ya, Doktor," came a plaintively glad voice from the darkness. "Ach, I waited—all day!"

There was a low light burning, and the Doctor reached and turned it big. It was a neat tidy room, mostly filled with the wooden double-bed. Mrs. Kroll was in bed, propped by pillows—a large fat woman, with a worn and wasted flabby face. Her eyes especially had a wasted look, surrounded by touches of red and gray and yel-

low flesh. Her nose was large; her lips large. She was breathing heavily.

The Doctor felt a pang of remorse for his enforced tardiness; it had been a crowded day. He sat down on a chair at the bedside.

"Mrs. Kroll," he said gravely, "forgive me for making you wait."

"Ach," she smiled, "but you are here. I could feel better already."

And to the simple woman his presence seemed to overflow the room. She muttered:

"Does it rain?"

"Listen!" he said.

They heard in the hush the mighty sweep of the storm, on roof, and window, and pavement. She shook her head.

"My Edy gets wet then?"

The Doctor laughed softly:

"No worrying! Edith can take care of herself! I want you to brace up, and feel better, and be happy!"

She smiled sweetly:

"No, Doktor, it is too late."

The sound of the rain darkened over him, but he leaned closer and spoke with a touch of tenderness:

"Well, tell me how you are feeling."

She began at once, after the Jewish manner, and described her symptoms:

"Doktor, I'm a sick woman. You couldn't tell how sick I am. Eat I a sausage day before yesterday for supper, and it stick in my stomach and make me stoss auf (belch) and I feel gas on my heart, so it goes jump like a baby. And such a rheumatis*mus* in my leg I got, like it was crazy. And my head! And my hand! And my stomach! I get very nervous. I could vomit my insides out. Um Gottes willen (for God's sake) how sick I am. Doktor, I think I'm a very sick woman. I got four children, one dead, holy God, but not such pains as these."

The Doctor knew the case well, and so he did not smile, but spoke even more tenderly:

"There is one thing you must do."

She put up a bony hand:

"Don't tell me to take castor oil, Doktor.

I couldn't do it. Rather would I die right away, and be done with it."

The Doctor smiled:

"No, it isn't that."

"Neither can I stay in bed. A woman must work."

"Not that—either."

Mrs. Kroll glanced at him, and spoke in a scared voice:

"To the hospital?"

"No," he said quietly, "not that. Something very simple and good."

She was ready to listen to him then, and asked what it was.

The Doctor leaned close and spoke gently:

"Don't worry."

Much pathos went into her voice then.

"Ah, worry? I must not worry?"

"Listen," he said very gently, "you can live many years yet and be very happy, if you live quietly—if you don't worry and get excited and worked up. Many, many years."

"And if I don't stop worrying—no?"

He said nothing, for his throat caught

slightly. The noise of the rain rose upon them and seemed to the poor woman to be sounding her death. It was very strange to be alive, and yet to be so near the passing. Then she heard the Doctor saying softly:

"What should you worry about?"

"My boys," she sobbed.

The Doctor spoke in a queer voice:

"Why I thought they were mighty good boys!"

"Yes," she sobbed, "but it's America, Doktor. In the old country we Jews were very different. We were pious and good and the children loved God. But here the children care for nothing—nothing but fun. They think a pious boy ain't stylish. They think their Mother is a back-number. So they run wild, and nothing stops them. They will never marry. If only my good man, *selig,* were alive!"

"The boys!" muttered the Doctor. "Yes, our Jewish boys all sow their wild oats."

The woman's voice arose and she gave vent to the tragedy of her life:

"When my man died, I thought these

boys would take his place. I thought I should be a proud Mother. Ach, they hurt the heart like strangers—my heart is zerrissen (ripped). They have made me old —I'm not such an old woman like I look—*they make my hair gray.* Maybe they think I'm not like other women." She became excited. "Maybe they think such an ugly thing don't want love and sweet words and good children. Maybe they forget what I done for them—how I got backache and hard hands bringing them up—how I work and work and work—I just kill myself working for my children. Ach, Gott, it's not good to be a Mother." She suddenly sat up in bed, her eyes flashed, and she cried out: "Look at me! See what my children done to me!"

The Doctor spoke firmly:

"It's just this you mustn't do. You mustn't give way like this. You must control yourself."

"Huh!" she muttered. "It's easy to say." She fell back on the pillow and pressed her breast. "But I've got a heart—here!"

In the silence again came the noise of

the wild rain sweeping the toilers home. The Doctor's heart went out to the poor woman, who once had her youth and her dreams.

"You have Edith," he murmured. "Remember that!"

An exquisite smile lit her face:

"My Edith!——" Then she sighed. "But a Mother thinks more of her boys."

"But Edith," the Doctor went on, "what a wonderful girl! You can be proud of her. Not many girls are earning as much; not many are so sweet and beautiful."

The woman breathed softly.

"Ach, Doktor," she said, "she helps me, works hard, makes me money—a good girl, a good girl." She went on musingly. "If I could live to see Edith married, I could die happy, I think."

"You shall," said the Doctor heartily.

"That I don't know," sighed the Mother. "For I must, must worry."

Then, in the silence, a door opened and shut, and a glad young voice cried, "Mother, Mother," and at once the music of the Spring overflowed the room. It seemed

good that the wild rain should encircle the warm human shelter; it made the home all the warmer and sweeter. The mother laughed softly, the Doctor arose, and then Edith glided in. She was bedraggled, dripping from head to foot, her clothes tight on her limbs, her hair pasted down her face. Tilting her hat, it spilled silver drops, and drops were falling from her chin. Like a wild-rose in rain, sweet enough to kiss, thought the Doctor.

She ran over with laughter:

"Oh, the Doctor! I didn't think *you'd* be here. I'm simply sopping wet. Such weather!"

"Well!" cried the Doctor. "No umbrella?"

"Umbrella! It's glorious!—But I'd better go in the kitchen, or I'll ruin the house!"

She vanished; the Doctor looked at the mother, and both laughed with delight. He leaned over and took her hand:

"How can you worry with *that* in the house?"

"I feel better," she murmured.

"Good," he said heartily. "Now, really, you'll brace up and take care of yourself. Good-by. I'll come again soon—just a social visit."

He groped through the inner room into the kitchen. Edith was reaching up on tiptoe to light the gas.

"Here," he said, taking the match. In the sudden glow, the room broke real and vivid about them—stove, and dining table, cupboard and ice box.

"How is she?" asked Edith anxiously.

He took a hand, held it close, and spoke very near and very low.

"Edith, your Mother must keep very quiet—she mustn't excite herself."

Her face lifted, quivering with care.

"Doctor."

"Yes."

"Do you think I'm a brave girl?"

"I do, Edith."

"Then tell me the truth. What is the matter with Mother?"

He spoke very tenderly.

"Edith, your Mother has a weak heart."

The girl trembled, and grew pale.

"Weak heart? You mean——"

"Yes," his voice was almost inaudible, "at any moment—unless she controls herself."

"And then——?"

"She may live years."

Her eyes were very large, her cheeks white. She gasped:

"My Mother—die?"

The Doctor whispered:

"You're a brave girl, Edith!"

The girl swayed:

"Oh, she's all I have; I can't stand it!"

Two tears ran down her face. "Doctor!"

"Hush!" he warned, "if she heard——!"

"I can't stand it!" She hid her face in her hands. "I can't stand it!"

The Doctor spoke in a voice of intimate pity:

"You must take good care of her, and make your brothers behave. If she lives quietly, it will be years yet. Come, Edith, your Mother needs you!"

He had touched the right string. The young girl threw up her head, and spoke with lovely courage:

"She needs me? Yes, I'm selfish. But" —she looked in the Doctor's face—"you can trust me. I'll keep Mother alive."

The Doctor pressed her hand hard.

"I knew it, Edith, I knew it!" And passed out.

For a moment she was stunned and wrung her hands. It was as if blackness had entered her heart; she felt lonely, forsaken. And then her Mother called:

"Come in and change your clothes, Edy."

And all the terror changed to tenderness. So she hurried in, and while her Mother was buttoning up her waist and she was rolling the water out of her long hair or changing her stockings and shoes, she asked a hundred loving questions. Wasn't there anything she could do? What did her Mother like? Should she get her some chicken to-morrow? Wouldn't she like to have a servant to help her?

"Servant? Are you crazy?" cried the Mother. "For thirty years I worked without a servant! *Now I should begin!*"

Edith turned about with divine eagerness:

"Mother! Couldn't I give up my job then, and stay home and help you? I'd take *such* care of you, dear!"

Her Mother ha-ha'd in her face:

"I could put your help under my fingernail. Dummer esel! (Stupid donkey.)"

The two brothers now came in, slamming the door.

"Well, Mutter," said the elder, a small stout fellow with a shining face, "how goes it?"

He rubbed his hands and grinned.

"Ach," said the Mother, "I'm a sick woman."

"Too much sausage, hey?" said the son glibly.

Edith spoke in a low voice.

"Sam, you'd better go in the kitchen!"

"Why?"

She came closer:

"Sam," her voice took on a command new to her, "go in the kitchen!"

He shrugged his shoulders in surprise and went. The other son, Marcus, who had the slimness of his sister without her beauty, muttered:

"Say, the sis is getting pretty fresh, ain't she?" And followed his brother.

Then Edith laughed and kissed her Mother.

"Dear," she whispered, "I'm going to take care of the boys and make them behave! Indeed, I will! And I'm going to make you just so happy!" She hugged the Mother to show her just how happy.

"Ah," said the Mother, "you are my baby, Edith!"

And they kissed each other, and Edith ran into the kitchen and prepared the supper, humming as she worked, and now and then a tear stealing down her cheek and angrily brushed off as she murmured:

"I promised him I'd be brave."

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST NIGHT

IT was a sight to watch Edith in the kitchen. She took to the work as any healthy-minded woman will; although she preferred fancy cooking to plain, and would glory in five-hours' toil on fruit-cake and be balked altogether at boiling eggs. The fine way she sliced bread, running the knife rhythmically; the delightful grace she showed as she forked at potato-slices frying in the pan; the tenderness she spent on a tough hunk of boiled meat, abstracted admiration even from her brothers. They didn't let on, however; merely howling their hunger and asking if supper never would be ready.

But at table they ate like healthy animals, and Edith glowed with motherly pleasure. After their first onslaught had ended, she

noticed that they both were glancing at her knowingly. Finally Sam cleared his throat.

"Might I inquire," he asked in a pompous way he sometimes affected, "if the parlor is in a condition to receive a caller?"

"Why?" asked Edith.

"Because, I suppose, there will *be* a caller."

"I can fix it up," said Edith simply.

The two brothers glanced at each other and winked. Said Marcus:

"Ain't she the baby, Sam?"

Sam cleared his throat again:

"And what if this caller is calling on my sister, Edith?"

Edith choked on some bread.

"On *me?*" she gasped.

"On you."

"Me?" She could not believe her ears.

"Shall I repeat it?" asked Sam. "I say, what if this young man is calling on you?"

"Young man? Goodness!"

The young men looked at each other and burst out laughing.

"Well," cried Marcus, smiting the table, "I'll be damned."

"You know, Marc," said Sam, "she never saw a young man before!"

Edith leaned forward, her cheeks red.

"If you're making fun of me," she cried indignantly, "Sam, if this is a joke——" Then, looking on their grinning faces, she rippled with laughter, "Oh, I'm such a fool!—Sam, is someone really going to call on me? Don't fool me, Sam."

Her voice was so tenderly sweet, that Sam, to drive home the truth, had to assume anger.

"I told you he was coming, and that's all there is to it. Call me a liar, why don't you?"

"But—surely?"

"Did I say so or not?"

"A young man?"

"No," snorted Marcus, "a young elephant!"

"To see *me?*"

"No," Marcus snorted again, "your Mother!"

"But who can want to see me?"

Sam ahemed.

"Oh—you know and I know and they know——"

"I know!" cried Edith, "it's that bald-headed Zug."

"Zug!" they laughed together, and Sam added: "Guess again!"

She had reached the end of her guessing. Poor Edith! Seventeen, and a young man's call was an event to send the blood to the cheeks and to set the heart a-thump. She forgot that she was never to be married; she forgot her questionings; in a moment of amazement all the yearning and mystery of the blue morning rushed upon her, crying: "Edith, you are woman!" She realized her sex in a white flash, as it were; and all the wild glory of her natural destiny rose like a vision before her. Now she knew. Now the yearnings had a meaning. Now Earth had a meaning; life had a meaning. A man wanted to see *her*. Why? Because she was a woman. What a wild wonder to be alive; what an adventure; what a romance!

So terrific was this blaze of new light that all this time she sat with flushed cheeks

and shining, far-seeing eyes and looked so beautiful that her brothers could not banter her, but marveled at the strange thing that had crept into the house. This was not Edith, their sister. This was someone new, a stranger. They were surprised, perhaps a little annoyed. It was a very quiet minute; but sometimes a minute works great changes.

Suddenly Edith leaped up and ran from the room. The brothers whistled and gave up girls as a bad job. But Edith had burst in on her Mother, and sat on the bed beside her.

"Mother, what do you think?"

"Think! Come along!"

"Mother!"

"Out with it!"

"Oh, Mother, you can't guess!" She darted and kissed a sallow cheek.

The Mother grunted.

"Mother," Edith burst out, "someone is calling on me to-night!"

"On you? Who?"

"A man—a young man!"

"A young man?" Now, was the Mother

indeed amazed. "Ah, dear one, dear one!" She laughed softly. "So comes a nice young man."

Edith's glad voice was full of mystery:

"Who should want to call on me?"

"Who? What's his name?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know?" cried the Mother; "what a fool! Don't know his name, and you ask him to call? Heavens, what a fool!"

Edith explained, and then was all eagerness. Was her hair right? Should she put on her blue dress? Should she change her collar? Then was her Mother all Mother, pulsing with joy, patting at the hair, tying a ribbon, adjusting a collar, and totally forgetting her troubles. Finally she gave her daughter a light kiss on the cheek.

"Who gets you," she murmured devoutly, "is a lucky man. I was never so beautiful myself. I was a good cook, and no good-looker. But then your father, *selig,* Edith, was a big eater. And you know," she added wisely, "you can't eat looks."

Edith wasn't listening. She was sum-

moning up male-images, but whenever a new face appeared, immediately Doctor Rast's face bobbed through it. If he was like the Doctor! But who could be like the Doctor? Who could be so handsome, so tender, so noble, so good? Doctor Rast might have answered her, being a man truthful with himself, and knowing some of his own limitations. But Edith was a young girl and had ideals. He was one of them.

So Edith wondered, and while she wondered, she flung into the parlor and gave it the worst cleaning-up it had ever received. Pins and threads were stooped for; dust was vanquished; curtains straightened; and when she was through the cheerful little room was trim and tidy. Then two lights sprang up and flooded the place golden. As Edith stood, surveying her work, she did not know how vital was her beauty—breathing there rich with life, even as a daisy is rich with sun and moisture and tint and form. She was just beginning to ripen—bud unfolding into flower—the white of dawn was still on her—the care-

less grace, the unstudied bewitchment, the fresh sweetness of a pure young girl.

Her brothers entered and expressed astonishment that a room in their flat should finally clean itself up; but Edith did not listen to them. And then came the knock.

Sam consulted his watch:

"Eight to the dot! I win my bet!"

Marcus grumbled.

"Say, sis, open!"

"*You* open!" she cried, and vanished.

Sam opened, and Edith heard low voices. She felt almost frightened; a little stifled. Sam spoke at the door:

"Someone for you, Eed."

"For *me?*"

She followed him into the golden flooded room. Frank Lasser was standing before her. And swiftly two strange emotions clashed within her, and left her standing mute. The first was a horrible disappointment; this smart young man was no Rast; the second was a throb of recognition; she had seen him somewhere. And standing thus, mute, lips parted, eyes drinking him in, she did not know her beauty!

Her brother Sam was speaking:

"Edith—this is Frank—Frank Lasser—old friend of mine——"

Frank reached out his hand, and she felt it cool and strong about hers. He was speaking, too; trying to speak in his light way, and making a bad fizzle of it:

"You see—Miss Kroll—we work in the same place."

"In the same place? Goldin's?"

"Yes—you see——" he paused.

"Oh!" she cried, and then remembered. He and Zug, they were at the window quarreling; she had gone in to quiet them.

He lowered his glance.

"Yes," he muttered, "Zug and I—you see we were at it a little——"

"A little?" she echoed, and then silver laughter woke, the air cleared, Frank felt at home at once, and the brothers made themselves "scarce"—though not without inviting Frank to join them "with the boys," and expressing consternation that he did not care for their society and telling him to "ware, ware the ladies," until Edith told them sharply to hurry up and shut out

the draught. They shut themselves out with it.

The two sat down, Frank on the sofa, Edith on a chair, and at once Edith was at her ease, and wondering why she had felt such strange pangs. Wasn't she used to men? She had brothers, and she had worked several years in business. She talked to strangers every day. And then why palpitation because one of them was in her home? She was inclined to laughter, which made her eyes sparkle and her voice melodious:

"You must be a new man."

"I am."

"Salesman?"

"Pennsylvania."

"Of course!" laughed Edith, "I entered it on the books—Frank Lasser. How is it I didn't see you?"

"Oh, I was just in a moment to see the boss—ain't he a terror?—and then I got out. I really go on to-morrow."

Edith wished he wouldn't say "ain't." He went on feebly:

"I hope I didn't make it unpleasant this morning."

"You did—a little," she said.

He was puzzled. Up to the present he had been a great "hand" with the ladies; his hard handsome face fascinating the fair sex. But this girl was different; she was new and strange; naive and direct. There was something about her, not of the face or form, that yet was shed by her personality—a something that came via the eyes or the voice or the gesture—a something penetratingly sweet and pure and poignant with mystery. A spiritual quality new to Frank. None of his familiar weapons was available — boisterousness, cynicism, flattery, all were useless. And so he felt as if he were weak as water, and yet as if some new Power were groping into his heart.

In the short awkward silence Edith could not help noticing and disliking his clothes. The young man had his legs crossed widely, his hands clasped about his knee—a favorite position of his, which dis-

played his light-green socks and patent leather low shoes. His necktie matched the socks, and was stuck with a ruby-studded horseshoe pin. His collar was a "choker"; his shirt broadly striped. Edith had a sudden senseless desire to muss his hair; it was so plastered and shiny. Altogether she began to think him very odd and funny, and not to be taken seriously.

But something had to be done with the silence, which was deepening, and which made Frank fidget. Finally he burst out:

"You see I met your brother Sam—at least I called at his place—and he promised to bring me up. Never knew he had a sister till this morning and then Zug told me."

As she said nothing, merely nodding, he stammered:

"What you think of Zug?"

"Mr. Zug? To tell you the truth, I've never thought very much about him. I'm busy at the office."

Frank brightened perceptibly.

"Say," he began, "it's quit raining.

Would you care to take a walk, Miss Kroll?"

This question was answered by three hearty knocks on the door. Edith laughed as she rose:

"That's Mr. Grupp."

"Grupp?" cried Frank, "Mo Grupp, salesman for Heimedinger's? Lordy, I know Mo."

Edith opened the door, and Mr. Grupp entered. He was a Bavarian built like a short Grenadier, soldier-straight and stout, with ruddy face and big spongy nose and weathered blue eyes. He had been a friend of the Krolls the last thirty years—watched the babies grow and the parents age—and for the delight of the human race spoke as broken an English as he could command.

He at once seized Edith under the chin.

"Ah, Sveetie!" he cried; "how's my Sveetie!"

Frank was seized with impatience; Edith laughed and drew back.

"Hello, Mo," said Frank.

Mr. Grupp wheeled around.

"Well, my old college chum!" They shook hands. "My old college chum!"

"What brings *you* here?" asked Frank.

"Such a question! I was here the day Edy was born, and you never heard such a yelling in your life. Have a cigar?" he drew one from his pocket and held it out, "It's my last!"

Frank refused laughingly, much to Mr. Grupp's relief. The older man sat down and began puffing comfortably. Frank looked at Edith, but Edith returned to her chair.

"Where's your Mudder?" asked Mr. Grupp.

"She's not so well," said Edith, "she's in bed."

"That's a fine way, when I call on her! Ach, but I'm sick, too!"

"Sick?" echoed Edith.

"Yes, I've lost my appetite. I remember twenty years ago, on my birthday, your Father, *selig,* for breakfast said, 'Eat till you busted,' und I eat a big juicy steak and twenty-two hard-boiled eggs. Then I could eat. But now? Oh, weh! Oh,

Mamma! I have no appetite. I can only eat breakfast in the morning, and then a little yowsa (bite) at ten; at noon, dinner, at four in the afternoon a cup of Mocha, then supper, and at ten o'clock another yowsa. I'm a sick man."

Edith laughed, for this was an old, old story. Mr. Grupp noticed how Frank was fidgeting and enjoyed the little comedy greatly. He deliberately reached over again and seized Edith's chin:

"Well, my Sweetie!"

Edith pushed his hand away.

"Don't!" she cried.

"Himmel! how nervous you're getting. Yes," he shook his head, "here they call it nervous, but in the old country they call it verrückt (crazy)."

Frank could not contain himself.

"Do you want to walk, Miss Kroll?"

"I don't know," said Edith. "Would you wait here, Mr. Grupp? Mother's alone."

"Oh, ho!" Mr. Grupp winked his eye. "That's the way, is it? Vell, for a consideration——"

"No," said Edith, "no kisses."

"Vell," he shrugged his shoulders, "I'm a poor Yank. So it goes!"

Edith smiled:

"Then I'll ask Mother!"

This was so naive that Frank almost laughed. Edith ran into her Mother's room.

"Asleep, dear?" The room was dark.

"No," came a soft voice in the warm darkness.

Edith felt out and touched the old arms, the old face.

"Mother dear," she leaned over and put cheek to cheek, "Mr. Grupp is here—he'll wait—may I go out for a walk with Mr. Lasser?"

The Mother laughed softly and drew the young face closer:

"Ach, ya, run along!"

"You're sure you won't need me?"

"Soon you won't ask no questions!—Is he a nice young feller?"

"I don't know. He's funny."

"Well, don't let him get any funnier till

you know positif his prospects and his savings and his family."

"Oh, Mother!" cried Edith, shocked.

She kissed the old face and stole back. Mr. Grupp was revealing his true heart to Frank, who was much bored, and kept saying flippantly, "Aw, cut it out! You don't know what you're talking about"—much to Edith's displeasure. Mr. Grupp was talking Socialism; he was describing the terrible lot of the toilers in mines and steel mills, and predicting revolution, all with a fiery passion that grew incoherent.

"You will see," he shouted, "we will have such a revolution worse than the pogroms of Russia and the Inquisitive-ition. Watch my vords."

"Cut it," cried Frank, and then saw Edith gazing at him.

Edith said in a low voice that she could go, so they put on coats and hats, and then finally Mr. Grupp buttonholed Frank as he was going out:

"Take my advice," he said, "for I know vomen, Mr. Lasser."

"Yes," said Frank irritably.

Mr. Grupp spoke dramatically with flourishes of the arm.

"A tiger, Mr. Lasser, a *lion,* Mr. Lasser, a *rhinoceros,* Mr. Lasser, *even a rattlesnake,* Mr. Lasser, you can tame—but a vomen, *never!*"

This was one of his pet formulas, and Edith laughed. Mr. Grupp continued:

"If you want to be happy—fifty years engaged, and one year married!"

Frank, catching Edith's eye then, laughed too, and they went out, groping their way down the dim stairs and into the street. There was something wild about the night, something sharp and vivid. Tattered clouds, in the highest skies, were racing, and it seemed as if the edge-broken moon were tumbling and plunging into the fleece —shrouded a moment, and then spilling through the thin silver fringe, and then rolling into a glory of moonlight. A star here and there came and went. The street-lamps sparkled sharp; the shop-windows were lit; the pavement, still wet, was daubed gold or silver by every light; and

people were wandering about, free and fresh in the cold blowing air.

As they walked along, Frank, under cover of night, became voluble, as if in answer to the Mother's question. Twelve a week and his expenses and commission; he could easily earn eighteen to twenty a week; a little family could live on that. He knew her brothers and many of the family friends. He remembered her father "one of the best of them"—an easy spender, a good fellow. He knew how to live! It's an art this generation hasn't learned. Now, heavens, he knew fellows who didn't smoke, or play cards, or go to the races, or go around. Was the world becoming womanized? The sissies! Why, a fellow wasn't a man until he had been through it all! Take this Zug; he was a queer one. Well, he smoked; a fellow had to with a customer; and he used to be a regular devil. But lately, he's a sis. Stays home with his folks at night; never touches a drop; never gambles. Tame as a dog. Eat out of your hand. Reformed all but his temper. Did Edith favor that type of man?

But Edith was with the racing moon. His talk had been blowing about her with the noises of the great night-city—the roar of the elevated train, the rattle of a late wagon, the stir and talk of people. Something of the morning came back to her, something of the romance that goes on unseen through all the world. The wild skies, the clear-eyed city, the buoyant air, the feel of a universe in action—everything intensely alive, pulsing, dreaming, struggling—not a grain of dust without its motion—and she moving through all, a part of the processes, a part of the to-and-fro, the give-and-take of living Nature. Glory was afoot; adventure was at hand. Whither was it all leading? What wild destiny was whirling her through this chaos of life? How good to breathe the air, how good to feel the blood tingle from ankle to neck, how good to swing along—give the body its way—give the mind to the moon, and the heart to the stirring people. She wanted to speak of it; loose the tumult within her; she felt creative, as all young people do; she wanted all this glory to

prompt her brain and her hands, until she shaped life, handled human beings, wrought in the world.

So, at his question, she dropped from the skies, as it were, to his side, and felt a sympathy for this living being who shared the night with her.

He repeated his question.

"Shall I tell you," she said softly, "what I like in a man?"

He felt a thrill steal through him; all the new Power worked on him and made him weak.

"Tell me," he murmured in a new voice —a voice lacking his habitual glibness and coarseness.

"I like a man to be simple and sincere—just himself——" she hesitated, and then went on with great courage. "In his clothes, too—not too flashy—rather too quiet—and the same in his manners. And he ought to think of others, and be very kind with stupid or weak people. I like such men—and women, too."

The effect of these plain words was emphatic. It was the new Power at work. It

was the woman-soul for the first time sweeping over his. He saw himself in a new light, and was acutely conscious of his socks, tie, pin, and shirt. He suddenly felt that Edith was at a great distance, and that, dressed as he was, and mannered as he was, he could not come an inch closer. That a woman should ever affect him in this way was inconceivable. That something pure and sweet should begin to bubble like a spring in his heart was a new experience. He felt uncomfortable—almost meek.

Edith went on, in a low voice:

"Do you know Doctor Rast?"

"Rast?" he stammered, "Dr. Rast?—Oh, I guess I've heard of him. He's that"—he was going to say—"molly coddle," but desisted.

"Dr. Rast," said the young idealist slowly, "is just what a man should be. He never thinks of himself; he gives his whole life to help others; he makes people glad they are living. He's very wonderful."

Frank was more and more disturbed. Edith went on:

"He loves people. Once I heard him

call the poor down here on the East Side, 'the beloved people!' "

They walked in silence.

"He's so real," said Edith fervently.

Frank felt a jealous stab.

"Is he married?"

"Oh," laughed Edith softly, "very much. And he has a boy three years old. I kissed him this morning."

"The Doctor?"

Edith's silver laughter matched the moon.

"No—the little boy."

They had almost unconsciously retraced their steps and stood before the doorway of the tenement.

"May I come up?" asked Frank.

"No," said Edith simply, "my Mother isn't well. I must look after her now."

Frank hesitated; thoughts and feelings hitherto unknown clamored at his lips; his eyes were glistening; he felt something break within, some hard crust about his heart; he was in a melting mood. It was her exquisite face, the light of blue eyes in the light of the moon, the quivering lips,

the tinted cheeks, the stray hair; it was the night; it was the glory of the new Power. His heart pounded, he was breathless, something shuddered down his back. He held out his hand, and when he enclosed hers and felt the little cool daintiness in his grasp, the moment grew musical and magic for him.

He caught her eyes then, and as she saw the strangeness of his, the expression of concern and longing and humility, the mother in her awoke. Was he trying for her sake? She pitied him, she wanted to help him, she looked at him with a sweet sadness. She took him into her life. She even, for a moment, liked his face.

At that look, all crashed within him. His eyes dimmed; her sweetness made him faint; her presence was a power that swept him. He had to speak.

"I want to say," he said brokenly, humbly, "I want to say—you've made me feel different on some things. I never knew a woman who—who made me feel this way. Good-night."

Her heart sang.

"You must come again—soon!" she cried.

And then she was gone.

It was as if he were a baby again in his Mother's arms. All the buried goodness and tenderness and love emerged again. He wandered home in a dream; he sought out his home in Henry Street, hardly noticed his mother and father and their two friends who were playing pinochle in the dining room, and went to bed. He could not sleep. He kept trying to see Edith's face—but it only came in enchanted glimpses—a glance of eyes, a quiver of lips, a tint of cheeks. More subtle and strong was the power of her spirit, sweeping over him like an ocean of sunrise, with singing voices and silent light and snatches of heavenly beauty and peace. He tried to summon up remembrance of the many women he had met—"peaches" all. But they somehow had lost their good looks. They were hard, coarse, vulgar. All the new Power in him repulsed these images. He could not laugh at himself, he could not be sufficiently amazed. All he knew was that henceforth there was but one real woman; and that

there was a hidden man in him long subdued, but now rising in strength and vitality and claiming possession of his body. For hours he lay awake, very still, very quiet, while music came and went, and visions of the Unseeable swept his brain, and his heart bubbled like a white dawn. It was a night of death and birth.

But Edith slept soundly beside her Mother. The Mother had asked her:

"Well, is he funny yet?"

"Sort of," said Edith tenderly, "but he can be nice when he wants to."

"H'm," muttered the Mother.

CHAPTER IV

THE SECOND NIGHT

ONE reason why Frank had never met a good woman was that since he was old enough to take to the streets he had not met his Mother. She was the type of woman one might call a shadow. Thin she was, frail, small, with large eyes and lips and fast-fading hair, and by dressing in black she made herself all the more obscure. Her husband was all bluster, emotion, impatience — March weather, a short man with a hawk nose and blood-shot eyes. The mother was negative, passive, unprotesting.

Wherefore when Frank came into the dining room that next morning and put his arms about her and gently kissed her, she was shocked, and feared he was ill. Her alarm increased as she noted his appear-

ance. He had on a dark shirt and a black tie; his collar was low; his face pale.

"What's the matter, Frank?" she asked.

"Nothing, Mother." He smiled gently.

"I thought——" but shadows do not tell their thoughts.

Gazing at her with curious eyes, Frank felt he was making a discovery. He began to realize how shabby her life was, lived possibly in an area of ten square city blocks. She never went anywhere; her sole pleasure was cards; her life was the common lot of the women of the poor—washing, scrubbing, cooking, sewing, marketing. Frank saw the pitiful lines of her face, the large hungry eyes, the tragic want. It went through him like a needle of pain that this too was a woman with all a woman's passions. Poor Mother! Seven times had she brought to this world in pain a human child. Seven seasons had she had of sickness unto death. Three times had she kissed a child's dead face and buried a fragment of her soul under Earth. And those who had lived! Sickness, poverty, constant worry and care, constant sewing

and washing. And yet she had said that she had not known trouble till her sixth child was born—her first boy—Frank. Frank remembered the phrase, and began to see something heroic in the quiet woman. He made up his mind to bring her some flowers that evening. He was the only child at home; the rest were married.

He was also deferential to his father, so much so that that gentleman suspected a plot, and began to bluster:

"You good-for-nothing loafer," he cried, shaking his newspaper, "what are you after? If it's money, go zum kukuk!"

Luckily, enough of the old Frank came back to answer this:

"Shut up, governor!" he snapped.

And the governor relaxed.

Frank kissed his mother good-by and went out into the brilliant weather. The wild fresh winds were loosed over the earth like young colts; blobs of white cloud swam over the blue; the sun came and went, the streets darkening into winter and then bursting splendid into spring. The air had an electric quality, that charged the heart

with lusty life. It was a morning for brisk walking, hard work, joy and good nature. Shadows slapped buildings and gutter, and vanished.

Frank hurried through the familiar streets. There was something glad and good in him; he had discovered his mother; now he was discovering a new world. He was really trying to see through Edith's eyes—to measure the world with the new man within him. As truly as he did not know his new self, he did not know these familiar people and streets. Life took on a new aspect; a new light bathed the world, and people, steeped in it, appeared divine. He had a feeling of wanting to stop people and shake them by the hands and tell them: "I know you now. You, too, love and have loved." Truly the world was a deeper and greater place than he had dreamed! There was more than the glittering surfaces and the laughter: there was a touch of glory, a vital meaning, a struggle of millions of destinies. And everywhere sprang the vision in shade and shine—sweet Edith.

Further than that his thought could not

go, for he was fumbling with new sensations, and could only feel them. But he was humble and glad and sad and thoughtful, and he longed with all his heart to see the young girl.

So thinking, almost instinctively he walked to Grand and Clinton on a chance of meeting her. Instead he met Marcus. He had a new feeling for Marcus, because he was Edith's brother. So he looked at him keenly, and noticed his peaked and drawn face, the look of haggard exhaustion, the expression of listless indifference.

As they walked along Frank asked him what the trouble was.

"Oh," said Marcus bitterly, "women."

"Women, eh?"

Marcus spoke more bitterly: "Why don't they put a fellow wise? Here I go and get this trouble—why, I ain't much of a sport, either."

"Tut, I've taken trouble from women myself."

Marcus evidently didn't know all the ins and outs.

"It's curable, ain't it?"

"Sure thing! You just go to one of those fellows who advertise in the papers. He'll fix you in a few weeks."

"Were you cured?"

"Of course."

"Are you sure, though?"

"Why, it's the simplest thing in the world. Quit your worrying. Every boy gets it. He's not a man till he's been through it."

Marcus was very bitter about the women. They were the ruination of the world; wild oats full of rotten disease; marriage not only a gamble but a hell.

Said Frank soothingly:

"I used to think the same myself. I think differently now. A good woman is an angel."

It did not occur to him that his change of attitude was wrought overnight.

And so they walked along, and then Marcus drifted off into the thronging people to such business as the day held for him, and Frank, with eager, quick steps, climbed to the loft, passed through the

roar of machines and the dim beings in the twilight and entered the front office.

Zug was standing at the shut window in a familiar attitude, foot on the low sill, hands in pockets. Frank made up his mind to be good to Zug, for, under the new dispensation, Zug also was a human being.

"Brisk weather!" he said.

He fell into Zug's attitude and both gazed idly at the busy street—the children snaking in and out, the fat women nosing about the pushcarts, the pedlars with their Babylonian beards, all the strange people garbed modernly and yet as old as Israel. It was a bright, living sight—dabs of red, blue, black—a mix and shuffle of faces and forms—each body standing out distinctly as it threaded among the others. Cars clanged by, wagons hurried.

"Yes," said Zug, "a snappy morning!"

He did not look at Frank.

Then came a light tread and both turned. There she was, just as we saw her yesterday. Blue hat, black feather; graceful girlish form, lines that rippled; wildrose

face. The light of the morning had risen; penetrated the clothing loft, and shone there like love. She smiled sweetly at both. Both murmured some nothingness. She passed into the other office. Only sunset remained—the empty glowing shell of day. They heard the little clatter as she uncovered the typewriter and set to work cleaning it. They loved the busy toil of her fingers. They imagined her face, bending low, absorbed.

"Jonas," said Frank, low, "come to lunch with me to-day."

Jonas muttered his willingness.

They went that noon to Fleischer's Bakery, in narrow Division Street, in darkness under the elevated road. When the door opens, and it does often (so many go to Fleischer's), the passing train drowns out speech. But Fleischer's was the place! There you could get eggs—sunny side up, browned-on-both, omelet, jelly or plain, scrambled, boiled,—and cakes! Cakes! Rings, eclairs, puffs, apple or cheese. And the waitresses, Jewish-fashion, show that

they are not menials and inferiors, but speak to you familiarly, and quarrel with you as if you belonged to the family. There never was an inferior Jew. Even if he is a pedlar he will discuss the weather or the cost of living or the Talmud as if he were an elder brother. To be a Jew is to belong to the oldest aristocracy of earth.

Students here sipped their coffee and talked Socialism, or Kant and Hegel, or Music or Literature, or the latest performance at the Yiddish theatre. Business men traded. Working girls gossiped of bosses, and she says, and he says, and do you know him, and what do you think.

Frank and Jonas had a little marble table to themselves, and spoke as best they could in the uproar.

Said Jonas:

"I saw you with Marc this morning."

"Well?"

"You know him pretty well, eh?"

"Known him years."

"Intimate?"

"Enough to call on him."

"Call? You ever call there?"

"Only last night!" Frank, in spite of himself, could not forbear a smile.

Jonas spoke jealously:

"You said yesterday you didn't know Miss Kroll."

"No more I did. I know her now, though!"

Frank saw the vein on Jonas' forehead swell out, and as Jonas leaned toward him, and said in a low voice:

"Lasser, I want to say something to you," he felt again that electric atmosphere as of two souls grappling in death struggle. He was not in a mood for trifling, and something dark issued up from his heart and his blood swiftened.

"Go ahead," he muttered, "but cut it short."

Zug leaned nearer, and his voice came low:

"Lasser, what's your game with this girl?"

"What's yours?"

"Lasser," Zug broke out, still keeping his voice private, "I know you. I know what

women mean to you. I'm not going to have *her* made unhappy."

The darkness in Frank deepened into blackness. He felt demons within him, a rage never before felt.

"Who gave *you* charge of her?" he muttered.

"Who?" Zug's voice came as if he were smothering or strangling, "I—I love her—I want to marry her—I—I love Edith!"

Frank at that moment did not sense the tragedy of Zug's life; he only felt outraged and blind devilish anger. He spoke very quietly:

"I ain't a baby, Zug, and if ever you talk to me this way again, I'll knock you down!"

Zug leaned still nearer.

"Be careful, Lasser. I swear I'll watch and protect her, and trip you up!"

Frank arose, and spoke hotly:

"I'll pay for you as I go out."

Zug rose:

"No you won't. I'll not take anything from you, Lasser!"

They elbowed each other at the cashier's desk and each paid for his own lunch.

Then they went out and separated. Zug returned to the office. He found Edith washing her hands in the little white basin. She looked very pretty, her sleeves up, and she nodded to him laughingly.

He paused beside her and tried to command himself. He was going to do her a service. She should come under his wing, Edith, the innocent. As he struggled with himself a beam of sunlight smote through the window, making the water flash, and lighting Edith's face as she looked at him.

He wanted to take her in his arms and kiss her vivid face. Then he spoke:

"What do you think of our new salesman?"

"Mr. Lasser?"

"Yes."

"Oh," she said lightly, "I guess he's all right."

Zug burst out strangely:

"No, he isn't all right. He's led a fast life. I'd almost call him a dissipated fellow. He's not the sort you ought to know."

"No?"

He had reckoned without the woman in

Edith. Glancing up, he saw that she was offended. She dried her hands slowly, and spoke evenly:

"You must never talk that way again, Mr. Zug. I don't like it!"

She went out. How could he know that she whom he wanted to take under his wing was taking Frank under *her* wing? That all the creative, the mother in her had risen, and she was filled with a passion for making a man out of him. Zug could not work that afternoon; he walked miles through the city, even up to Central Park, torn with jealousy, despair, and love, and struggling with his doom. He felt the coming of a great tragedy. He felt that Edith, unknown to herself, had swung out on the perilous seas of life, and that her pilot would steer her on the rocks. When he thought of her pure girlhood, her fresh beauty, her spiritual strength, and foresaw the change that might come—the change to disaster, the blighting of the bud, the dry-rot of the years, it seemed to him that he would go insane. Who could protect her? She was enfolded in ignorance

and carelessness—the stupid old mother, the flippant brothers. Where was there help? Her own innocence was now her worst enemy. Vile system of education that allows boys to get their knowledge of sex on the street and then turns them loose on girls who know nothing, girls who are carefully shielded from the very facts that concern them deepest! What more near to a girl than motherhood? And here was Edith, just made to be a wife, a mother, even created for love and joy of husband and laughing children, and she knew so little. She could be led by a Lasser, and God knows the Lassers of this world have wrecked many sweet possibilities.

Full of this storm was Zug, poor honest fellow! He was nearly thirty; he had not been an angel; but there was in him something solid and sound—a right worthy man—a man who would have served Edith like a faithful dog, showered her with "attentions," foreseen her least wishes, shielded her from pain, smoothed out life's wrinkles, blunted the blows of tragedy. All this

he had done for her, and given her, too, passionately strong children.

So he went his way, raving; as many others at this moment go *their* way raving; this being a strange world. The whole heart wishes something; the passion that fills it we connect with God; it seems inevitable; for this we were born. But never in our lives shall we have it. Another comes and takes it easily. And if such is our nature, we rave. If we could wing in an aeroplane above the city, and the roofs were removed, and through some new telescope we could see simultaneously the lives of four million people, the sight would be branded on the brain as with white fire. Women shrieking with childbirth, death-rattle of babe or man, deserted wives, suicides, crime, lust, ruin, a host that rave. And yet walk the streets—how common are these people! How curious or happy or listless! A stolid crowd! The men in the cars read their papers, the people in sky-scrapers talk business, the restaurants are filled with chatter and laughter, the theaters roar with applause.

And so Zug, whose imagination was not social, walked through a city of souls, who all about him wept, shrieked, laughed, toiled, raved, and he knew it not. Out of four millions three were vivid and real—Edith, Lasser, himself. And so he went his way.

Edith and Frank went *their* way.

Edith was putting on coat and hat under the electric bulb at six, when Frank asked if he could accompany her. She smilingly assenting, they went out together. Her blood was up; her heart and mind roused. She knew already her power over this man, and was too much of a woman and too ignorant not to use it. It was an experiment in motherhood. So she saw no harm in having him at her side, and she made up her mind to give him much good advice and plenty of ideals. Withal she was so much herself, or possibly, so full of more than herself (heaven and earth is in all youth!) that Frank noticed no change.

The skies had cleared, and were beginning to fill with stars; the wind had died, the air warmed. Again Spring leapt on

the earth, dancing over sea, and city and prairie, scattering blossoms and babies, and hope and youth and love. The city throbbed all about them; windows shone golden with hint of supper and gathered families; the day's work was ended. Evening had come with peace and joy and contentment. Frank had so much to say that he said nothing. He wanted to tell her of his long sleepless night. But her presence at his side, the touch of her elbow, the swing of her skirt, the faint glimpses of her face, flung a wild enchantment over him. And she, too, at the first new breath of Spring, was swept by strange passions. Not as yesterday—vague yearning, vague desire, the sadness and longing for something than all things wilder, sweeter. She felt sex. She felt that she was a woman, and he a man. She felt that she was being wooed—the old, old romance, the magic pursuit, the witchery of the hunt. Beautiful it was, and sad as moon-stirred seas, filling the eyes with tears, shaking the sweet flesh with tremors, waking the brain to the music of the earth and the heavens.

So neither spoke, but at the doorway:

"It will be such a good night to-night for a walk," said Frank.

"All right; then come at eight!"

He came. Edith laughed at his side. The warmth of the night had drawn people out of doors, as the sun's heat unfolds buds. The streets flowered with human beings. Boys and girls played across the gutter; women sat out on stoops with their babies; organ-grinders were abroad with shouted song; the soda-water stands at corners were being tapped of green and scarlet liquids, weird to eye and tongue; and the lovers wove their way like melodies through the air. Oh, air, languishing, caressing, perfect! Oh, scene, human, warm, divine! Oh, night with yonder still, still moon, nearly full . . . Silver is on the pulsing city; towers loom black; ferries glisten red and green and gold on the swimming tides. On such a night!

Edith was laughing.

"Marc was going out, but I told him to stay till I got back. He didn't want to, so I made him!"

Frank laughed.

"Where shall we go? Do you ever go to the Nickel Theater?"

"Yes, and I love to. But first we must go to Dr. Rast. I have to report Mother's case!"

Dr. Rast! So he would see the Ideal. His blood quickened.

"Is your Mother very ill?"

Sad was Edith:

"Yes—very—she has a weak heart—you know what that means."

Frank said nothing; Edith went on tragically:

"Really, if anything happened to Mother——"

Frank's heart went out in pity:

"Why should anything happen?"

"She gets excited—and she mustn't—anything like that might kill her!"

Frank found nothing further to say, and then, queer thing, strive as she would, Edith could keep neither fear nor grief in her heart. They sprang from her breast like birds and disappeared in yonder moon. Magic poured into her; she laughed over

trifles; she felt elate, free, gay. Wings sprouted on her shoulder-blades and lifted her lightly along. On such a night! Frank was enchanted with her; all the spiritual strength of hers was now touched with airy poetry, winding him with light ecstasy.

She would stop to look at a baby, or clutch a dirty little urchin, or mark the progress of the moon judged by the house-tops, or point out a drift of chimney smoke thinning into silver; and so they tripped along, or winged along, neither now being near the earth, darted across the Playground Park, that lay bare and black-shadowed in the moonlight and came to Dr. Rast's office. The hall-door was open, so they went in and knocked.

The Doctor flung open the door.

"Edith?"

"Yes," she laughed, "and this," Frank emerged from darkness, "is Mr. Lasser."

"Glad to know you!" he shook hands with Frank. "Come in!"

They entered the cozy glowing office, with its flat top desk in center, its curtains, its shining instrument case. Nell was

sitting on the rocker, at her everlasting sewing. The windows were open; the street-noise entered; but the hush and sanctity of home were in the room—an atmosphere steeped with love and content and labor done and done well. The tears came to Edith's eyes. Just such a home did she want! But with whom? She glanced curiously at Frank.

He was studying the Doctor; his handsome face, throbbing with life, was intent on the Ideal. So this was it—big, dark, smooth-faced, simple. Edith understood his studious look. She thrilled to think that he was studying a model.

All of which was in the flash of a moment. Nell rose and greeted Edith with a kiss, and met Frank with extended hand. The Doctor puffed hard at his pipe. Nell put an arm about Edith.

"Morris," she cried, "did you ever see a girl so radiantly happy?"

The Doctor looked from Edith to Frank, and from Frank to Edith. He didn't much favor Frank. But he laughed heartily.

"What's up, Edith?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing at all?" asked the Doctor.

"Nothing."

Whereupon all four laughed as if that were a hugh joke.

"I guess it's the weather," said Nell.

"H'm," said the Doctor, "H'm!"

Edith explained then that her mother had had a bad day, and would the Doctor look in to-morrow? He said he would.

Edith dismissed the subject:

"Where's the baby?"

"Davy?" growled the Doctor. "Don't you call him a baby." He imitated his son. "He's a *big boy!*"

"Want to see him?" asked Nell. "Fast asleep!"

They started arms round each other.

"May I come, too?" asked Frank.

"Surely," cried the Doctor. "I, too."

They all went on tiptoe in the dark bedroom, and the Doctor lit the gas, turning it dim. Softly they peered into the crib, and saw that perfect miracle—the head sideways, red lips parted, cheek rosy, lids together, tuft of hair on the pillow, and one

little hand lying on the coverlet. A living child, but snatched to the far world of sleep. Breathing, but a blank. Heart beating, but all the vision of this earth shut away.

"Beautiful," murmured Edith.

She turned to Frank.

"Don't you love little children?" she whispered.

Never had he loved them, but a terrific pang went through him. Now he loved them.

"I do—I do," he breathed.

Softly they went out. The ties between Edith and Frank were thickening. Those last few words had stirred both to the soul. How could he help thinking of *their* children? How could she help thinging of *her* children? And the father? The Doctor and Nell said little to these entranced visitors. There was little to say. What would you say to an angel that suddenly flew in at the window? So the Doctor shut them out into a moonlight night, and Nell and he looked at each other with glistening eyes.

"Her time has come," whispered the

Doctor. The bud begins to open. Springtime—girlhood! Oh, the mystery!"

"But do you like him?" asked Nell.

"I'm not going to marry him," said the Doctor.

Into the moonlight stepped our pretty pair. Or rather winged again. And thus found themselves in the Playground Park.

"Shall we sit a little?" asked he.

"Yes," laughed she.

They sat down on a bench; behind them green was tipping the branches of a bush; the earth smelt damp and new; and above them, stars, stars, stars . . . and the moon. . . .

"Just look!" said Edith.

He looked; she looked—everywhere stars, dimmed about the solemn glory of the moon.

"What are they, I wonder," whispered she, "so far from us?"

"They say," he murmured, "many of them are worlds bigger than this world and people live on them. . . ."

"Oh, isn't the world big," said she.

"We down here," laughed Frank, "are nothing."

"But we see it all!"

They were silent.

"And isn't it beautiful!" breathed Edith. "Did you ever know how beautiful it was before!"

"No," he whispered, "never."

"Everything seems alive," she whispered, "the earth . . . the air . . . the moon . . . the stars . . . we . . ."

On such a night! Oh, moon, that shinest on these young souls! Oh, air, fragrant with earth, caressing, languishing! Oh, world so fearfully wrought, so marvelous and magical! Oh, we living beings that breathe this air, that see yonder moon and stars, that feel this night! Why should we not give up our hearts to these strange ecstasies, these wild enchantments? Is not life common enough, sordid enough—— Why not one night of magic and glamour?

The two trembled close together; his face was softened with unselfish love; the night and Edith had conquered him. His face

was almost beautiful with man-beauty. He leaned and whispered near.

"Listen!"

He half-turned toward her, and their eyes met.

"I want to tell you," he whispered, and his heart poured mellow with the words, "you've changed me; made a man of me. I never knew there was such a woman!"

She was looking into his eyes. Her face was perfect with its sadness, its ecstasy, its flash and tint and shadow and fire. And then, as she saw his changed face and heard the wonderful words, suddenly a bolt of electric lightning shot her heart, sprang through her eyes, smote through his, consumed him head to foot. Both were weakened; trembled; could not look away.

He murmured:

"Edith."

She sighed.

"Edith."

Then her eyes fell.

"No," she murmured.

But the thing had happened. For life and death, Edith, you are his, he is yours.

Nature has spoken through you both, and Nature is stronger than either of you. He is what he is, O Seventeen, but whatever he is, he is yours. Marriages are not arranged by mortals—at least, not the real ones.

Surely there are many powers in this world. Have we not given some of them names? Electricity, heat, light, steam, gravitation. But there are many other Powers, Powers unclassified, bunched under just one name—God. It is when these Powers are at work that we little human beings are used by mighty hands.

Remember Edith's age. She was just ripening; she was just awake to sex; she was ready. The moment came. Frank happened to be beside her. Nature flung the bolt through her and him.

She was looking down. There was a long and sacred silence. For in the first glow, contact is a sacrilege, and words are useless. Frank's better nature was uppermost. He would have died for her at the moment. He was breathless; he could not see. He knew, and she knew. That was enough. Not yet, O Human Marriage! And yet

could they ever be more married than at that first flash?

She murmured in a queer, tremulous voice:

"Take me home. . . . I want to go home."

He conducted her silently. They saw no people, though this happens to be an inhabited city; they saw no houses; they saw no moon nor lamps. Voices they heard, pouring an ecstatic music; spheres of fire winged about them. They were not in Time and Space; they were in . . . Love.

For many hours, before sleeping, they heard that music, saw that fire.

We may not tell of it. But we know. We, too, were young.

CHAPTER V

SPRING MUSIC

WHO shall yet come to our earth and sing to us of love? Many have tried: Sappho and Shakespeare and Dante and Tennyson. Tut! our own hearts sing better. Yet let a hint be given here and there, to recall our hearts to the sacred theme.

Eighty wonderful days passed over the earth, though you and I knew it not. While we were grubbing downtown and eating and sleeping uptown, Edith and Frank were in the Enchanted Gardens. Enchanted Gardens, by the way, are everywhere. On mountain tops and in mid-seas, in the Bermudas or in the Rockies, desolate coasts or democratic prairies. So, too, are the Enchanted Gardens in the slums of the city. For, after all, they exist not in

stone and water and soil and vegetation; their dwelling is the human soul.

Edith sits at her typewriter, some one enters, and at once there is music in the air; or the two walk home together talking intimately; or they sit in the golden-flooded parlor, the mother darning stockings and telling them her troubles; or they wander among the people on a perfect night; or Frank is away in his Pennsylvania with daily interchange of letters — prosaic enough to the outsider, pure poetry to two of us.

And yet, all this time, not one word of love. Such things can be! How many times our young man wants to speak out; how many times our young woman wants to listen. He does not speak, she does not hear. Why? There are a hundred reasons, light as air. He wants to make good at his new job; she has qualms about her mother. Marriage must wait. And why hurry? Is it not enough just to *be*—to know and see and meet and part, while the days drift by, and earth is full of dream and witchery? No, in this first sacred pas-

sion, no contact is needed, no kiss, no word of love. The golden air that wraps them is enough.

And all the while Love is ripening the girl. She is fast becoming a woman; she sees the world now as an assemblage of children. She, the Mother, has come to it. Grave is the responsibility, sweet the burden. There are visions of home and little ones and the husband coming from work at night. Fast is she becoming a woman. Every one notes it. The new dignity, the sweet seriousness of eyes, the troubled air, the grace of carriage. Even her form responds, and seems to bloom, with greater richness and roundness. Her clothes, too, cease to be girlish. Her own mother doesn't know her, she changes so day to day. Her brothers cease to talk down to her, and are forced to respect her. She is more tender about the house; she helps thoughtfully; she sympathizes. And yet, at a moment's notice, off she flings her new mantle of womanhood, and is a radiant ecstasy, a whirl of music and laughter, a wildness of enchantment. Those are moments when she breaks

open the kissed letter in secret, or hears some one's knock at the door, or casually meets some one in the street.

And we cannot help admiring Frank. Cynicism, flippancy, indecency are buried with the wild oats. He has become a serious-mannered man. He thinks deeply these days. He goes on with his discovery of the world, and his heartstrings pulse to the life about him. His mother's cheeks begin to glow; she ceases to be a shadow. Frank is the most wonderful son in the world. How thoughtful! Yesterday he brought me a belt-buckle from Pittsburgh! He never forgets his mother! Everywhere *one* is with him, hovering over him, changing him, transforming him. More and more deep the brute is buried; more and more powerful grows the man. He does not spend on himself, but saves. His bank account shows the new Power. He is planning ahead for that little home. And yet he, too, at a moment's notice, flings off his new manhood, and is—all that she is. So young has he become, that he feels he has

no past, he feels pure and good and worthy. Such is the magic of the Enchanted Gardens.

Zug understands; but he is helpless and it is too late, anyhow. He goes his own way.

Doctor Rast understands, and gets joy from it, being a wise man, and hence draining good out of all situations.

The mother understands, and, having satisfied herself concerning family and salary and prospects, is ready to die happily.

All the world knows, and is reminded of its youth, and has its delighted laugh.

Then comes an ardent summer's night, after a roasting summer's day. Edith and Frank are at Coney Island. They have wandered among the dense hot people; they have heard blare of brass, and beat of drum; the carousel has shrieked around; the screaming ladies bumped the bumps; the laughter-shrill girls shot the chutes. Edith and Frank are tired of the noise. They wander to the sand, they walk away from the din.

Then, lo, the beauty of the night! Lustrous stars in the still heavens, ocean running in and out gold against the flare of Coney; breakers with soft cry thinning on the beach. Oh, the loneliness, the heartache, the sad music of the sea. Close they walk, and closer. They are both filled with sadness, unutterable, poignant yearning. They want each other. Away world! Away you shouting crowds! They want each other—the soul cries, the flesh cries.

They stand still and listen. How the ocean is yearning, as if for speech! They droop toward each other. Now enchantment is not enough, golden air is not enough. Each other they want. Yes, the ripening process is brought to an issue!

Very close they stand.

"Edith!"

"Frank!"

"Edith—Edith!"

"Oh, Frank!"

He grasps her hand, she does not withdraw it.

"I love you . . ." he whispers.

"I love you."

Her arms are about his neck, his about hers. Their lips meet . . . and oh, the heights, the heights . . . ecstasy, swooning ecstasy. . . .

CHAPTER VI

MR. GRUPP INTERRUPTS

THAT next night was a hot one. The Krolls and Mr. Grupp sat at table in the kitchen in the late light of day. They were drinking iced tea to wash down the cold sliced lamb. The pitcher clinked; knives and forks clattered; flies buzzed about their ears or sung their swan-songs on the sticky fly-paper; and through the open window and door came the jarring clamor of the city. Boys were yelling on the street; the neighbors up and downstairs were arguing with loud voices; somewhere a baby began to howl; laughter shook the air; wheel-noise; whistle-shriek.

The hot spell was on. All day the toilers had been wasted in a furnace of stone; walls and pave breathed heat; and with the coming of scarlet sunset, a great noise went up

from the released millions. The poor fat mother was dizzy and faint, and quarreled and complained; Edith, in a thin white dress that made her look very girlish, was a million miles away on the wings of dream; the boys and Mr. Grupp, in their shirt-sleeves, damned the weather

Said Mr. Grupp:

"I saw a fat woman-lady on Hester Street melt. The boys made a sliding-pond afterward."

Marcus and Sam laughed.

"She had a rubber mouth," said Mr. Grupp. "It was so elastic, a Grand Street pushcart could turn around in it."

He arose from his chair and circled the table for a lump of sugar.

"What are you getting up for?" cried Mrs. Kroll indignantly. "Such manners!"

"Oh, excuse! excuse!" he moaned. "You're so nervous. Yes, in the old country they call it meschugge (loony)."

"Will you sit down?" cried Mrs. Kroll.

But Mr. Grupp seized Edith under the chin.

"My Sweetie! Give me a kiss!"

Edith's laughter rippled silver-clear and sweet.

"Later!" she whispered mysteriously.

"*Will* you sit down?" cried the mother, outraged.

"Just one kiss!" he laughed. "See how her nose turns up, the little Sveetie!"

Edith pushed his hand away.

"Oh, the women!" he sighed, "I'm glad I'm an old batch."

"Sit down!" cried the mother.

"Sit down!" the boys chorused.

Mr. Grupp stole behind Marcus, crooked his first finger against his thumb, and with a low, "I give you a *schnelker,*" let the first finger fly like a steel spring released. It caught Marcus a sting on the ear. Mr. Grupp danced up and down with glee, while the mother and boys shouted:

"Don't you begin your *schnelking!* It's too hot!"

Schnelking was a Grupp institution, which he assured them he himself had introduced in America, though, much to his own discomfort, as he himself received the

greatest number. Laughingly, he returned to his seat, the sweat trickling down his ruddy face.

"Oh, weh," he wailed, "I've lost my appetite——" and as he was about to tell them of the juicy steak, the twenty-two eggs and the yowsas, the boys cried:

"Cut it out!"

"Lost your appetite!" shrilled the mother. "You eat like a pig."

"Now, I'm insulted," said Mr. Grupp, mournfully shaking his head. "Next time I wouldn't come here; I stay away; and then there will be crying and howling, 'Oh, where is Mr. Grupp, where is Mo.' You'll be sorry if I don't come!—Pardon the pickles!"

Sam handed him the pickles.

"Have some more meat, Mo," he urged.

"Not for a thousand dollars," cried Mr. Grupp. "Never." He shrugged his shoulders. "But seeing it's on the table—well ——"

He took a generous slice.

The mother was slicing the cake.

"Mamma," said Sam acidly, "why do you have cake? You know no one cares for it."

"If you don't like what you get here," cried the mother, "find some other boarding house!"

"But why do you have cake?" insisted Sam.

The mother began to tremble.

"You'll be glad yet if you can get cake ——" she began.

Edith woke from her trance and spoke sharply:

"Sam!" She turned to her mother: "Remember, dear!"

Sam drummed on the table, the mother wiped her eyes. Mr. Grupp looked tragic.

But then he pulled out a cigar and offered it to Sam.

"My last," he said.

The air cleared in laughter.

"That's one of those smoke here and die home," growled Sam. "No, thanks."

"Very well," said Mr. Grupp, and lit up.

Then he expanded. Then he blew clouds

of foul smoke. Then he sang German student-songs, with roaring choruses. Then he arose and tramped grenadier-fashion up and down the kitchen.

Edith and her mother cleared the table and washed the dishes at the sink; the boys put on shirts and collars and coats, and, announcing that they would return in the cold gray dawning of the morning after, went off for their night on the water. Then, at last, Edith stole into the dark parlor, whose ceiling was splashed with light from the street below, and sat on the sill of the open window, leaning out on the fire-escape.

Intensely human was the scene. All the windows opposite were open, and in the lit rooms she saw the silhouettes of moving women and men and children. Children played on the fire-escapes; out of dark windows hung shadowy forms, and the street from end to end was black with humanity. Boys and girls played I-spy over the gutter; the stoops were thronged with mothers taking the evening air; young men and women stood before lighted shop-windows chatting, flirting, laughing. She saw in the

delicatessen shop opposite the busy tradesman with his wife, the little children and the women customers. The night was dripping hot, the darkened heavens pulsing red with the lights of the broadcast city; but so much better was it than the sun-wilted day, that people breathed free, resting, laughing, chatting.

Sweet was the scene, and so human, that it brought the tears to Edith's eyes. How she loved the world at that moment. For she loved and was loved, and it seemed to her that all these people, too, were lovers —a world of lovers—the young boys and girls, the husbands and wives, the mothers with young babies, the grandmothers and grandfathers. Into this life she would plunge; these people her people; their lives her life. She wanted but the commonest, humanest things. She had no dream of wealth or power or pleasure. She wanted her own home; her husband; her children. She wanted to travel in the dust of the common road, deep in the warmth of the human crowd.

All day she had been overbubbling with

laughter and tears, with happiness wild and perfect, with blushes and shy beating of the heart, and now her heart took on tenderness, a great tenderness. No longer was she contented with the first enchantment of love; something more real, something more of the brown earth, something rooted in the soil she wanted. She wanted Frank; her own home; her own table and stove.

There was a light knock on the door; she leaped up with a glad cry, and Frank came in. Their arms went about each other, tenderly; their lips, still tingling with that first kiss, met again; she drew his head closer passionately.

"How are you?" he murmured. "Edith, how are you?"

"Ssh!" she warned. "Mother! I'll light up! Quick!"

They laughed excitedly, and as Edith whispered, "Tell her right away! Have it over with!" he lit the gas, turning it low, so that the shutters could remain open. They heard the mother coming, and courage oozed out of them; Frank felt very young, much ashamed and very self-con-

scious; and Edith grew pale and blushed rosily and shyly hung her head. The mother, who all along was but a poor sick woman, now seemed a veritable ogre.

She toddled in, puffing.

"Oh, good evening!" she said to Frank.

He grasped her hand very eagerly.

"I hope you are feeling well! I hope you ain't sick in this weather!"

"Ain't?" whispered Edith.

Frank laughed strangely, and all sat down, the mother rocking slowly in a big rocker, and fanning herself with a Yiddish newspaper. Only then did Edith notice how carefully he was dressed. Poor fellow! he felt as if he were decked for his own funeral.

The mother pounced upon the word "sick."

"You should never be so sick as I, Mr. Lasser. Oi! Oi! Eat I some strudel yesterday and some ice-cream and cucumbers, and I get such cramps in my stomach, like I could yell. You could feel here," she pressed her hand on her side, "I get a lump

like a piece of ice. Did you ever have gas on the heart——"

But Frank was too excited.

"Mrs. Kroll," he burst out, "I want to speak to you!"

"What?"

"I want to speak to you!"

"Speak?"

"Yes—I want to tell you something!"

The mother looked from one to the other.

"Well, young man, speak!"

The air was breathless now, vague with expectancy, hushed with crisis. Frank had had his speech all ready, well rehearsed, but the "young man" took the wind out of his sails. He collapsed, and the drops stood out on his forehead.

"You know"—he stammered—"why—it's just——"

"Oh, my old college chum!"

And in burst expansive Mr. Grupp. "My old college chum! I'm so glad to see you!"

He rushed over to Frank and seized his hand. Edith frowned, Frank pushed him off.

"How do you do!" cried Mr. Grupp. "It's so long since I seen you! But I met your uncle on Broadway yesterday."

The mother could not contain herself.

"Will you go out? That man's a nuisance! Go out!"

"Oh, how nervous we're getting," wailed Mr. Grupp. "You shouldn't get so nervous."

Edith spoke in a low, tremulous voice:

"Mr. Lasser wants to speak to Mother. Please—please go out, Mr. Grupp!"

"Oh, ho," cried Mr. Grupp. "Ah, ha! Business! God forbid I should distoib you. I be back in a minute."

So saying, he vanished.

Rude was the excitement in the air. The mother stopped fanning; Frank shrank and shrank until he was small enough for short pants; Edith looked away, and gasped.

"Well, young man," said the mother, as if she were charging an enemy.

"You see," he stammered, "it's just like this——"

"Don't grabble around so," the mother spoke frankly.

Frank stared at her; she stared at him. That was too much for Edith, who loosed silver bells of laughter, ran to her mother, circled her neck, and whispered:

"Mother, dear—you know—you must know!"

And Frank, laughing nervously, took up the tale:

"Why, of course, Edith and I——"

In burst the inevitable Grupp, announcing with waving hand:

"The trouble is just this. The young folks kiss each other too much, and then, when they are married, they couldn't kiss for a hundred dollars. Now the right way is this: One kiss a day, before and after. And you could kiss all your life!"

"Will you go out?" shrilled the mother. "Did you ever see such a man?"

"Oh," he cried, in astonishment. "Business! Business! I'll be right back!"

And vanished.

"Such a man!" cried the mother.

Silence followed, vast and empty silence. Then Frank tried again:

"As I was about to say——"

Suddenly the mother rose, Frank rose, Edith rose. A radiant smile was on the mother's face:

"I know—Frank," she said simply, and seized him and kissed him.

He flung his arms about the good woman and hugged her for all he was worth.

Edith clapped her hands, and cried:

"Mother! Mother, darling!"

And then mother and daughter clasped and kissed. Wild joy sang through the room. Mother and daughter wept those tears that underlie laughter, the tears of sacred joy, and Mr. Grupp, bursting in with:

"It's a bargain," received the promised kiss from his "Sweetie," and gripping Frank's hand, advised fifty years engaged, one year married.

Then all sat down, and lips were loosed.

"Mother," cried Edith, "we've loved each other ever so long, and ever so much! I can't tell you how much! Did you ever even dream we were in love?"

"Did I ever?" laughed the mother.

"What children! I knew it already two months."

"And never said a word?" from Edith.

"What could I say! What children!—Frank!" she began.

"Yes, Mother!"

Then they all laughed again, and Edith sat on the arm of Frank's chair and kissed him for the word.

The mother's voice saddened:

"Edy is a good girl—she is the best I have in this world. I could die happy if she was married to a good man."

Frank spoke very humbly:

"I—I'll try to be worthy of Edith."

"Oh," cried Edith, "you don't know Frank. He's noble and true and good——"

"No, Edith," he said, in a low voice, "don't say that!"

So Edith kissed him and whispered of his goodness.

"Ah, Mr. Grupp," said the mother tearfully, "the children grow up in a day, and you and I get old. But I am very happy."

Then she rose and took Frank by the hand and spoke to him secretly.

"Be very good to Edy. Make her very happy. I was not so happy myself. I know how it is. Always be kind, and think of her, and do little things to please her. She is not like other girls, Frank; she wants little—only some one should love her, and be kind, and make a home for her."

Frank could hardly speak for tears:

"There is no girl like her in the world, Mother. I swear I'll be good to her!"

"Good!" she murmured. "That's right!" and again she kissed him.

"So," she nodded to Mr. Grupp. "Come —they want to talk!"

And she and Mr. Grupp went out, and the lovers sat down on the sofa together. They were very serious that night. Life was very sacred and sweet. Edith put her head on his shoulder, and he drew her close.

"Sweetheart!" he said.

A kiss had to follow that wonderful word, and then they began speaking in low voices:

"Soon," he said, "we shall have our home, Edith—just you and I there, alone—alone together——"

"Alone together!" she echoed.

They were silent, dreaming of that humble vision—those rooms with two faces coming and going—and then Edith:

"Isn't it strange that out of all people, just you and I should marry each other?"

"No, it had to be."

"Do you really think so, dear?"

Again a wonderful word, and a kiss.

"Yes," said he.

"Oh, I'm glad! I'm glad, then! Because I want to feel that you are just for me—only for me."

"I am," he murmured.

Their talk began to grow practical, as it should have, for the daily toil must be touched and transformed by the high love.

"Oh, I am going to be such a good manager," said Edith. "I'm going to have Mother teach me the things I don't know. I want to be the best housewife in the world."

He laughed softly:

"You will be! And I'll be so proud of my wife!"

"Your *wife!*"

"Yes," he murmured, "dear little wife!"

She put her arms about him.

"Husband!"

Sweet and deep was the embrace and the kiss.

And lest we now be overwhelmed with kisses, we must gently draw the curtain while these two young human beings gaze into the sunrise of their wedded life.

CHAPTER VII

THE GOLDEN-HAIRED ONE

FRANK was in Pittsburgh the following Saturday night, and Pittsburgh is a weird city. It is a narrow point of river-ringed land, circled with mills that flame like Inferno all night long. All day the soft-coal smoke shrouds the streets, and at times thickens into a dirty fog. The buildings are soot-blackened and look old. The stranger goes about with an umbrella, momently expecting a storm to break. Not all the water in the Ohio River can keep the hands of the town clean. One dabs up soot from the parlor-table, and clean linen lasts an hour. Out of the mouths of the converters lining the river below shoots up a snow of golden flakes, and as one draws near one hears the wild *klong-a-al, bang-bang, st-st-st, spla, wow* of the mills as of

a jungle howling, and one sees half-naked men, like imps, running in and out among the flames. Shanties and palaces cling to the hollows and hills of the town, side by side.

What can a full-blooded man do in such a town on a Saturday night? There are a few theaters, but Frank was not allured. Besides, he was saving money. He had finished his day's business, and as there was no train for the next town till the morning, he was forced to inhabit Pittsburgh overnight. He had written the daily letter to Edith, and sent it by special delivery. Some old friends had asked him to "go out with the boys." He had refused, much to their amusement.

So he sauntered down Fifth Avenue, which end to end was a blaze of wild advertisements and glaring shop-windows. The music of the Nickel Theaters blared out over the street; globes of copper light flooded the pavement; a long procession of lighted trolley-cars thumped by, up, and down; and a black swarm of holiday-happy people streamed about him. Newsboys

shouted; young girls laughed. For the week's work was ended, for all save the toilers in the mills—those souls being consumed in the fires of Pittsburgh—and a glad irresponsible freedom leaped from heart to heart, from eye to eye, from lip to lip. A wine of splendor drenched the cool air; an electricity of romance was abroad.

Frank was listless; Frank was lonely. The evening stretched before him interminably long. What should he do? Girls laughed in his eyes—sweet faces, daring faces, flashing faces. He grew restless, feverish. Old voices began to call him; the old wildness swept round him. He could not help thinking back to the wild-oats days, when his Saturday nights held an intoxication long since put by. It was the wine of life that was offered to his lips again; the wine that courses through the veins like fire, and sweeps the brain with a glad delirium. More and more restless he trudged along, trying to keep himself in hand, trying to deafen his ears to the siren voices of the past.

But the Past keeps a strange grip on the

soul. Bury the old Frank ever so deep, he is still there. Those brain-cells wrought by the wild young years are still there in the gray convolutions. We are but prisoners of the Past that bore us. And so this night Frank was beginning to pay for his youth.

He was startled to feel these old desires, these old memories swarming over him like roused hornets. And then suddenly he remembered the "golden-haired one"—over the river, in Alleghany, Madge Madden, the strapping Valkyrie-woman, blue-eyed and golden-haired. Madge was a country girl, full-blooded, the health of the hills and the sun and wind not yet worn away. She had not the flaccid appearance of vice; rather the flaunting bold strength of a daring adventuress. She was a strong goddess of the streets. How well Frank remembered her! How she had enchanted him in the old days!

And now strolling along he remembered her glad bold voice; he felt her touch; he saw vividly her face. The young girls smiled on him, recalling the fact that he

was handsome. His blood began to beat faster; his pulses thronged with life; he wanted adventure, enjoyment. Edith began to fade far; New York was a long distance to the East; a man lives but once. Why not enjoy *this* night, too? This night is as real as any other, and it is fast slipping through the fingers.

The old Frank was in the ascendant. His eyes began to sparkle, he smiled, he hurried. By instinct, if not by forethought, he began to wander across dark vacant streets to the river. He paid the penny-toll at the bridge and began walking across. Below him ran the smooth river-tide with here and there a suspended lantern casting its gold or red or green reflection like a lance along the swaying waters. A soft cool air blew sweet over his face, with dark hint of pungent coal-smoke. Overhead, here and there, was a star. Behind him glowed the towering city; before him were the low dim lights and the strings of street-lamps of Alleghany. A madness seized him; lusty sang his blood. And so he penetrated those streets, trudging by lonely one

and two-story brick houses, and passing now and then some shattered woman who emerged from the shadows.

Those months which had so changed him fell off, dropping into far abysses. And yet, but a few days before he had kissed Edith good-by, and they had shed tears together! And yet this very afternoon he had written her a tender letter, full of heartache and loneliness and passionate vows and sweet kisses—which letter on the morrow Edith would cry over, and press to her lips and her heart. But far away was the sweet, true little woman—quite vanished. Such is the strength of the buried Past.

Up a little hilly street he wandered, entered a dark empty hall, and knocked on a door. He felt laughably excited and daring. He even felt that he had regained his true manhood, that now he was free and bold and brave.

The door flung open. In a dim glow stood the golden-haired one, large as life.

"Who is it?" the voice held harsh, strong music.

"Me, Madge!"

"You?" she cried, delighted. "Well, I'll be hanged! Hello!" She seized his hand and pulled him into the room. "Frank, but I'm glad to see you! Show your face. Let me get a look."

She had a little asbestos gas-grate rippling low flame under the mantel. No other light was in the room, and the soft blue glow spread out and up, leaving the ceiling and walls in shadow. The air was just cool enough for a bit of fire.

"Well," he laughed, "I'm here!"

She drew him before the fire, looked him over, and plunged him in a low Morris chair. He settled back comfortably. She took a deep chair opposite, and offered him cigarettes.

They both lit up and puffed idly.

In the dancing blue light he noticed her face, the wild golden hair, the blue eyes and red lips, the rosy cheeks. A little voice in him cried out that there was coarseness and vulgarity in the face, but he hushed it, and gave himself over to enjoyment.

The strong music of her voice rose again:

"You're a nice one! I've been as lonely as a cat!"

"Miss me, Madge?"

She spoke musingly:

"Every Saturday night I thought it was you coming. I had everything ready. Look."

He looked. On a small table at his side was a bottle of whiskey and a siphon of vichy and two glasses.

"Well!" he cried, his pride roused, "you're a dandy."

Her voice was almost sad:

"I'll never forget *you* Frank."

"Oh, why not?" he asked lightly.

"Hard to say," she sighed. "I've known many men—but a woman only takes to one."

He felt a thrill at the words. Suddenly she laughed gaily, throwing back her head:

"But away with the mopes! This won't do, my handsome! Fill the glass, and let's forget!"

He leaned and poured whiskey and sprayed vichy, and each held up a glass.

"Here's—us," she cried.

"Us!"

Glasses clinked, and they drank. She put hers on the broad arm of her chair, and leaned over and took his hand and looked in his face.

"Frank, you didn't go back on me?"

He smiled and shook his head no.

"You're sure, Frank?"

"Sure," he muttered.

"You know," she mused, "they all go, sooner or later, one by one." She spoke in an intimate rich voice: "You didn't come here to say good-by?"

"To say hello, Madge," he murmured.

"Then why," she asked low, "did you keep me waiting all this time?"

"I was busy."

"Busy! No, it wasn't that! I know what it was!"

He laughed softly and she patted his hand.

"It's some other woman, Frank," she said slowly, "it's some one else. I know you. Will-o'-the-wisp!"

He lied to her face:

"No, no!"

Mad was his blood that moment; near were her lips, her eyes, her hair.

"Madge!" he whispered.

She laughed softly:

"I believe the boy still cares."

She sat back, still laughing, and Frank started to fill his glass again.

Suddenly Madge sat up.

"Hello," she cried sharply.

Frank turned toward her.

She got to her feet, seized his hands, and pulled him up.

"You've changed," she said sharply, "you're different. Where's your horseshoe pin, your high collar, your—Frank! You're not a sport any more. You've toned down. I see it. Don't say you haven't. What's happened?"

"What of it?" he stammered.

"Yes, you have, you have!" She drew him nearer. "Look in my eyes, Frank, look me straight in the eyes."

He tried to meet her eyes; he was confused and annoyed.

She spoke in a low voice:

"It *is* some other woman."

He looked down. She breathed closer.

"Are you going to be married?"

He said nothing.

"Are you going to be married?"

He said angrily:

"What if I am?"

She spoke very low:

"You lied to my face! You lied to my face!"

He could not meet her eyes. Suddenly he felt a terrific sweep of shame pass through him; shame and guilt. Why was he here? He had a sharp vision of Edith, reproach on her face. Why had he come? All passion went out of him; he was angry with Madge, and hated himself.

"Let me alone," he blustered.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm going—good-by!"

She seized his arm:

"No—forgive me—I didn't mean it—tell me about her, Frank. Tell me!"

He pushed her hand away and started.

"Frank!"

"I'm going to leave you. I had no business to come!"

"But now you're here. You must stay—you must!"

"I tell you I'm going."

"You're not!" Again she seized his arm. "You're going to stay! You must!"

"Will you let me alone?" He threw off her arm, and reached for his hat.

"Frank! Frank!"

"Good-by!" he cried.

"But just to-night! I didn't mean it. Can't you forgive me? For old sakes' sake?"

"I'm going back to her."

She laughed wildly:

"Then go. But I'll have my last kiss!"

She flung her arms about his neck and kissed him. He turned madly, he drew her close. But she pushed him away, wildly laughing.

"Go! Go!"

She opened the door, and seized his arm:

"Go, I tell you!"

He passed through and she slammed the door. Then he reeled out like a drunkard in the cool night air, and knew himself as he was.

CHAPTER VIII

TWILIGHT

A SWEET rain freshened the summer afternoon, drawing a good smell from the baking pavements. Our wild-rose, who perhaps was changing into a red, red rose of the gardens, she was so womanly grave and wise, stole forth to see Nell Rast. She did not use her umbrella, for the rain was sweet on her face, and she had on old clothes. And so she glided along, among the playing children and the serious idle old men and women, fresh as the rain, rich as the summer.

She had given up her job; there was much sewing to be done—linen to be initialed, and a modest trousseau to be wrought. She had said good-by to the boss, who, spite of his grim ways, showed his sorrow in a little check. She had said

good-by to Jonas Zug, and told him so cordially that he must call after she was married, that he could not speak. And now the long, long summer days were hers —what dreams, what schemes, what happy business! Her mother took on new life as they discussed stitches and soups and furniture. And Nell, meeting her marketing, basket on arm, had told her to call. Nell was very sensitive about people. Almost intuitively she knew them. She could not let this innocent girl go ignorantly into marriage.

And so Edith glided into the cool, dark hallway and knocked at the kitchen. Nell opened the door.

"Why, it's Edith," she laughed, and kissed her. "It's sweet of you to come!"

Edith laughed softly, and stepped in. Davy was tagging at his mother's skirt.

"Mother! Mother! Mother!"

"Well, son?"

"Where *are* you?"

Nell and Edith looked at eacn other laughingly. The woman and the girl made a pretty contrast—Nell with her large

brown eyes, her hair parted in center and soft over her forehead, her olive-tinted cheeks, and Edith with lighted blue eyes and light hair and wild-rose cheeks—the one, blooming in womanhood, yet graceful and exquisite; the other, just brimming over girlhood, wild in her beauty. Yet they were both of a size.

"You little boy," cried the mother, and plucked him up and pushed his face close to Edith's. "Give the pretty lady a kiss! Give Aunt Edith a kiss!"

But Davy only stared, and pushed off.

"Don't you love me?" asked Edith.

"No," he cried, "I *can't* love you; I only like you."

The distinction was a fine one, and Edith laughed.

"Whom do you love?"

"I love Mother! Mother," he cried, "where *are* you?"

"Here, son!"

"Then, please, dear darling Mother dear, I want to be a little helper!"

And he began pulling roguishly at her hair.

"Stop!" she cried. "Shall I put ink on your hand?"

"Don't you do that!" he warned her.

"Naughty boy! Now you can't be a helper!"

She set him on the floor, and he drew down the corners of his lips like a bow pulled round, and spoke slowly with stifled sobs:

"I didn't mean it! I was only teasing you! I couldn't help it!"

"Surely?"

"Please, please, dear Mother dear!"

"And you'll never do it again?"

"No!"

So Nell took from the table a bowl of cake dough still in the pasty state and put it on a chair, and the young man danced with delight, took a big metal spoon and worked vigorously, like the laborer he was.

Nell put two kitchen chairs side by side.

"I want you near me," she said, in a low voice.

Edith took off her hat and sat down.

"You're sure I'm not keeping you from your work?"

Nell only laughed and sat next her and took her two hands.

"Dear," she said sweetly, "I think you're getting more beautiful every day."

The wild-rose blushed.

"When is he coming back?"

"To-morrow."

Nell put an arm about the girl.

"Edith," she said, "I want you to be very happy in your marriage. I have been in mine."

"I know," murmured Edith.

"We have had many troubles," her voice shook a little. "Davy has had his sicknesses. Sometimes the work seems like drudgery. Sometimes I get a bit heart-sick because I don't see enough of my husband. You see he is a very busy man. Just now, for instance, there's a roomful of patients in front and he won't be finished till supper time. And then," her voice lowered, "we've had money-troubles. Marriage isn't easy, dear, even when there's love. There are so many disappointments, so many ruined hopes, so much wasted strength and time. And one has to make allowances."

She hesitated a moment.

"Don't you think the Doctor a splendid man?"

"He's perfect," whispered the wild-rose.

Nell laughed softly.

"No, dear, not perfect. Splendid, but very human. I want to tell you something, Edith; I want to make one thing clear to avoid a mistake on your part."

"What is that?"

"No two human beings," said Nell, "no matter how good they are and how much they love, can live together without now and then getting tired of each other or jarring on one another."

"Oh, but it's different——" Edith began.

"No, it isn't," laughed Nell. "Don't believe me now, but when the time comes, you will remember and be wise. That is the time for making allowances, for making sacrifices."

The wild-rose didn't believe a word.

"And then," Nell went on, "remember, too, that love changes. Everything changes. We change and our lives and our passions change. The enchantment that

comes before marriage fades afterward; fades, vanishes, to give way for something deeper, more durable, more sacred. There will even come a time when you will wonder if you love your husband—no, don't stop me—and then you will find that it is but the pain of growth. A better love is taking its place."

The wild-rose protested that never in her life would she cease for a moment to love her husband.

At this juncture groans arose from the son of the family.

"Oh! Oh!" he groaned.

"What's the matter?" cried Nell.

"I'm putting pepper and salt in!"

"Pepper and salt?" Nell arose in horror. "What have *you* been doing?"

She strode over to a scene of ruin.

"Edith," she exclaimed, and then shook with wild laughter. "Look at this! The rogue's taken his father's tobacco-can and sprinkled the cake! You scamp! You rogue!"

She seized the young man by the arm, and again he made a mouth:

"I'm only putting pepper and salt in!"

"You've ruined my nice cake, you scamp!"

Edith doubled up with laughter. There was nothing to be done, so his lordship had his way, and mixed in what ingredients he could find, finally sweeping bread crumbs from the table and making neat designs on the paste.

Then Nell sat down again and went on, gently and simply as any mother. She spoke of the need of a woman keeping young—not by devices of hair and dress so much—but by extending her life beyond her home.

"Don't be shut in four walls; don't narrow down to three rooms and a street; get out; get into other activities; see people; study, read, go to theater—anything. And keep pace with your husband. Don't let him grow away from you. Know his work; his ambition. Understand and help."

She tried to impress on Edith the need of growth; the need of an open mind and heart; a receptivity to the unfamiliar; a

courage in making experiments in life, in testing out new theories by actual living. And then by slow degrees their talk drifted into the deepest theme of life; the theme that is blood and breath of woman's existence—creation.

Edith grew breathless. Now was she stirred to the very soul. Now was her thirst for knowledge to be quenched, her darkness irradiated with light. Nell put it very simply—how children are born—but the facts went crashing through the girl's ignorance like gusts of lightning.

"You see," said Nell, "mothers don't tell their daughters, and the young girls go into the greatest and most vital things of their life without knowing, without knowing. I want you to know."

Edith clung to her; she felt the burden of a new responsibility; she felt as if there were to be put in her hands a godlike power; the power of creating new life on the earth; that the very strength of the suns and the might of God would pass through her.

And then Nell went on to speak of men,

and the perils of marriage. She spoke of the double-standard, under which men freely go with women before marriage, and girls remain innocent.

"Oh," cried Edith, staring with large eyes, "but not all men. Not all!"

"Most of them," said Nell sadly.

"It can't be," cried Edith. And suddenly she remembered Zug's words, and grew very pale.

Darkness was beginning to spread up on her horizon. Better to remain ignorant and happy!

Nell saw the look in her eyes.

"Dear," she cried, "don't feel that way about it. It's no dishonor for a boy to go wrong to-day—really it isn't. They, too, are ignorant. They, too, must be taught. But I had to tell you on account of the dangers. Those dangers can be avoided—a simple matter——"

But she got no further that day. Just then the Doctor came in, in his white office coat, and the two jumped up like guilty children.

"H'm," growled the Doctor, "conspiracy?"

Nell said laughingly:

"It's Edith, dear!"

He shook her hand listlessly.

"Goodness," he muttered, stretching his arms out, "I'm sick and tired! Nell, I thought that bunch of aches and pains would never quit."

"My poor, poor man!" murmured Nell.

"Oh," cried the Doctor, "I'm sick of it all! Drat it!"

The wild-rose was shocked, and the Doctor laughed.

"Well, Edith," he muttered, trying hard to be less tired, "where's the man?"

"Away."

But the Doctor was too tired; he sat down on a chair.

"I'd better go," said Edith.

"But you must come in a day or two," cried Nell eagerly, "remember, there is something I *must* tell you!"

They kissed each other; Davy submitted a cheek; the Doctor nodded his head, and

the wild-rose wandered home through the late day.

A tumult of new passions possessed her all the evening and deep into the night. Facts are aggressive. They leap up at us, sting us, batter a breach, drive into the mind, tear old beliefs to tatters, root themselves, throw up defenses, and so become part of our lives. Edith felt her old life slipping away from her; the vision of the world changed; she was no more what she had been. She could not be a young girl any more. She went through the birth-throes of womanhood.

She began to see that marriage is not the end of life, but rather the beginning of a new life; that she was called upon to shoulder vast responsibilities; that it was more than a matter of love; it was life-work. She must prepare herself for pain and stubborn struggle and obstinate difficulties. She sat that night looking into the vastness of life. Torn away was the enchantment. This was serious business; this was life and death.

And yet far within her there was a strange sense of joy—the feeling that she

was no longer to be shut out from the common experiences of mankind. It is no blessing to be ignorantly innocent; such a state is shallow; the very terror of the deep crises of life have a wonder in them no real man or woman would forego. Each wants life to the full, the bitter and the sweet, the fire as well as the light.

Many such thoughts surged dimly or clearly through her mind, and mixed with them were strange new passions concerning the man who was to be her husband. The intimate relationships to be frightened her; and now, in the light of her new knowledge he loomed a different man. She thought she had known him; she had not. He was a power that would work on all her life; he was a stranger. Nell had spoken of dangers to be avoided. What danger could there be? How could Frank be dangerous?

Common sense came back and laughed at the notion. Dear Frank! Did he not truly love her; did she not love him? That was enough. Where then was the danger? Frank was true as steel; and how he had

changed. Ever was he getting gentler and nobler—more attentive, more kind and loving. He would do anything for her. Such a man dangerous?

And then the last few months came up again, the lightning bolt that spring night in the Playground Park; the golden eighty days; the first kiss in the sound of the sea; the sweet tenderness; his letters. Instinct told her that all was well.

"Nevertheless," said the wise little wild-rose, "he and I shall have a candid talk!"

Blessings on the wild-rose!

She was beginning to breathe happily again, and snuggle up in her soft night-gown, inviting sleep, when a strange noise stirred her. It was her mother gasping.

"Mother!" she cried, sitting up, "Mother!"

The cry rang sharp from her heart. Her mother tried to rise, fell back, gasped, choked.

"Mother!" cried Edith frantically, clutching her hand.

Then, at last her mother spoke:

"All right! all right! Get the Doctor!"

"Oh, but are you sure you're all right!"

"Ya, ya—run and get the Doctor!"

Edith bolted from bed, groped out and out, trembling with fear, found a match, struck it and lit a small light. She leaned over her mother, and saw her purple face, the rolling eyes. She felt as if the sight would drive her crazy. She was utterly alone; so helpless. Then she flung open the door to the adjoining room, and cried:

"Sam! Marc! Sam!"

But the room was empty. The brothers were still out.

"What shall I do?" she muttered. "What shall I do?"

And, at once, her mind cleared; she was calm and self-possessed, though blackness showered upon her. She dressed quickly, took a last look at her mother, stole down the black halls, and then went winging her way through the deserted streets.

Fear speeded her. She brought up panting at Doctor Rast's and rang the night-bell. After what seemed a long time, the Doctor opened the door on a crack.

"Yes?"

"Come over to my mother—quick!"

"I will!"

The door shut.

She sped back; she climbed the black steps; she burst into the room. Her mother was still a haggard sight, but breathed easily.

"Mother! Tell me!" cried Edith.

"I'm—I'm a little better! Thank you!"

Edith sank on her knees, head in the covers.

"Oh, Mother," she sobbed, "Mother! Mother!"

The Doctor found her still sobbing.

Gently he lifted her, and helped her to a chair, and then bent above the patient.

"Mrs. Kroll!"

The mother opened her eyes, and then smiled wonderfully.

"Ach, Doctor! Good Doctor!"

"Yes, yes!—Pain?"

She sighed:

"It does not matter now!"

He examined her, and then turned and looked at Edith. Poor wild-rose! Black-

ness shot his heart, and pity, and love. He touched Edith on the shoulder.

"Edith!"

She arose, sobbing.

"Come," he whispered tenderly, "come in the parlor."

She groped her way blindly, her hand feeling out. The dim light of the room followed them. Silence, the infinite silence of a sleeping city lay about them; deepened now by the strange hush of sickness. The Doctor stood over the girl, and waited.

Then she murmured, on a strangling sob:

"Yes—Doctor."

"Edith," he spoke very gently, very slowly, "I am going to trust to you."

"Yes——"

"I am going to ask courage and help. I need you to-night."

He waited.

"Yes——" she cried.

All his heart went out to her; she was so young for sorrow. He spoke in a voice pure with pity:

"Edith, your mother is very, very sick."

"Oh, I know"—a wild sob escaped—"don't you think I know?"

She sobbed bitterly. And what could he do but help her to a chair and wish she were his own child that he might enfold her and comfort her?

"Listen," he said hurriedly, "I am going to send a nurse in the morning. We will take good care of the Mother, Edith—we will do all we can for her—we will make the pain little as possible. Edith, to-night you must nurse her—to-night you must go on being brave and strong. You were brave to come for me. Be brave still. Don't cry, Edith."

Her sobbing slowed and died. She wiped her face, rubbed her eyes. She arose full of gentleness and thoughtfulness.

"That's over," she said. "I'll do anything, Doctor Rast."

He pressed her tear-wet hand with both of his.

"Fight the good fight!" he said, and quickly he gave her directions.

While they were talking, there was a noise at the kitchen door.

"My brothers!" said Edith. "Quick—they must be quiet!"

She hurried into the dark kitchen, followed by the Doctor. The sleeping-room light fell dimly, and in that light the brothers stood bewildered.

"What's the matter, Sis? Mutter?"

"Ssh!" she said, "Mother's very, very sick."

The brothers stood stupid and staring.

Doctor Rast spoke quietly:

"We will get a nurse for her in the morning, and Edith will take care of her to-night. One of you come for me if anything happens. And be very quiet. She must not be disturbed."

Sam spoke roughly:

"I could stay with Mother, Sis. You get some sleep."

Strange were the words on his lips.

Edith spoke gently:

"No, Sam. You and Marc get your rest. You must work to-morrow, and I can sleep in the morning."

Marc tried his best, too.

"If you want anything, Sis, why—call on me."

A great crisis faced the three and drew them closer together. The Doctor spoke a last word of courage and went. The brothers tiptoed to their room, and went to bed in silence. Edith sat by her mother.

Long was the night. Time and again she glanced at her mother's face, and though she had never had a God she created one this night, and prayed to Him for her mother's life. No answer came through the still air. Earth beneath her rolled through the empty star-surrounded heavens, bearing its precious cargo of life. Out of the earth's side new life emerged, old life vanished, an ebb and flow of the vital tides. In how many other rooms of the planet sprang the new cry of babes and the last cry of the dying. Swift indeed was the unfolding of this young girl, through first love, through deeper knowledge, and now through tragedy. Life deepened about her this night, fraught with a reality never before suspected.

And as she gazed in the old face, its red

and yellow engulfed eyes, its lines chiseled by the struggles and the joys and the dreams of years, it seemed to her as if she read there the book of her mother's life. How clearly was love and pain written there! And this was her own mother!

Then, like the cut of a knife in her heart, for the first time she realized a stupendous fact. She could hardly breathe for the wonder and terror of it. She—she herself had once lain curled under this woman's heart. She was flesh of this flesh, bone of this bone, soul of this soul. And after she emerged in the world, a separate body, what if she were still in the mother —in her heart, in her soul? All these long years enfolded and engulfed in mother-love! How those worn hands had wrought for her, those lips spoken for her, that soul fought and labored and endured for her! Oh, so close she was to her mother! Closer, closer than flesh of flesh. Terrible and miraculous was the tie. Now she knew what "Mother" meant.

And now if her mother should be swept away, sucked back by the earth, torn and

sundered would be this miraculous tie. She, Edith, would be alone, alone in this world. What world? Even the Earth that was Mother of all life. Earth—Mother? Did earth enfold and engulf us with love, too? Were we flesh of her flesh, spirit of her spirit? Edith felt a new wonder fill her. She was indeed finding God this night. She looked about the room with a curious interest; she listened to the night with an inner ear, and it seemed as if in these walls, these streets, this air something lived, something real and powerful and wonderful. Peace stole in her, deep peace, and the great love, the love that swallows in its vastness the eddying dust of our little human loves, filled her. Her heart opened—opened out to the invisible—and she was transfigured with an ineffable glory. . . .

Slow went the hours, and though she arose to her mother's call, and fetched and helped and nursed, she moved through tranquility; she stirred with power. It was the unfolding of the deepest within her. And how deep are we within! How deeper

than thought can reach! Power beneath power, love beneath love.

Morning came; timid gray light trembling; chirp of sparrows; rattle of milk-wagon; first stir of feet on the still pavement; light and more light; and all the world of people woke; talked, ate, went forth, and the great city thundered with labor and action.

The brothers made their low-voiced inquiries; stood silent at the foot of the mother's bed, and took her gentle good morning, and went out choking. The nurse came at eight, a quiet, neat young woman with glasses, who took charge with sweet cheer.

"You run right along," she hustled Edith out. "I don't want any kids around. Curl up and go to sleep!"

Edith smiled:

"But Mother may need me, Miss Roth."

"Nonsense and fiddlesticks! I'll teach you a thing or two! Go right to sleep, and don't bother me!"

Edith curled up on the parlor-sofa, and suddenly the nurse tucked her up in a blanket and kissed her.

When she awoke it was afternoon; warm, shining, drowsy. Miss Roth was rocking to and fro. Edith sat up and stared at her.

"Well, child," cried the nurse, "am I as ugly as all that? The nerve of you!"

"Oh!" cried Edith, "I didn't know."

"Didn't know!" echoed the nurse. "I like that! Well, take a good look."

Edith laughed softly, and arose.

"But Mother——" she began.

"Your mother's all right! You just run along and take a bite! Quick!"

"I'm not hungry——"

"What! Are you crossing me? Don't you say another word, but into the kitchen with you!"

Miss Roth arose, eyes blazing through her glasses.

"Out with you, quick! I'll teach these children!"

Edith laughed, and went out by the hall to the kitchen. She even tried to eat, though she wanted nothing. Then came a knock on the door, a knock that sped a wonderful gladness through her. She leaped up, flung the door wide.

"Oh, Frank!" she cried out; "Frank—sweetheart!"

She girdled him with her arms, clung to him, clung to him. At last! The man! The strength! He stood silent, struggling with shame and remorse. She drew back in wild surprise, and saw his white face.

"Oh," she cried, "you've heard!"

"Heard?" he muttered, "heard what?"

"About Mother!"

His voice was queer:

"Your mother?"

"How sick she is!"

"No," he stammered, "she's—sick?"

"We have a nurse—she's very, very sick——"

His lips parted; he stared at her.

"So sick?"

He gave a groan:

"Edith! Edith! Edith!"

Then he clasped her to his heart, and they clung to one another.

"Come," she said sadly, for the moment grew sweet to her, "come and sit down and talk with me."

They sat together at the table.

"It's so good to have you here," she said gravely. "I just need you, dear."

He patted her hand and glanced at the wild-rose face. It seemed to him that she had changed since he left. He felt younger than she. She seemed so wise and womanly.

"It's so strange," she went on, "everything's so strange. But I've made up my mind to be wise and brave, and not make a nuisance of myself."

Her voice deepened; her eyes filled.

"I never knew I loved my mother so."

He glanced down; and then her voice came poignantly sad:

"It's never been very easy for her, Frank. And now——"

There was a deep silence.

"Oh," she said, from her heart of hearts, "I'm so glad you're here, dear."

He murmured that he, too, was glad. Again there was a deep silence.

"Frank."

"Yes."

"Can't we talk a little? I feel things so deeply to-day. I want to know you better.

I want to know my husband. We mustn't hide anything from each other. We must be candid, dear."

She was speaking more like a mother than a wife. He was puzzled and disturbed and felt guilty.

"Yes, Edith."

"May I say things?"

"Why not?"

"Anything I want?"

"Sure—anything."

"Then listen."

She spoke very intimately, very sweetly:

"I've had a good talk with Mrs. Rast. She told me about marriage——" then the wild-rose hesitated and was confused; but she tried to go on, so she looked away and spoke in a low voice: "about how babies are born. . . ."

Frank was startled.

"Yes. . . ."

"And other things," Edith went on, still looking away, "about men . . . about the double standard. . . ."

His voice was very queer.

"Double standard?"

"Yes . . . men," her cheeks burned, "going around before they are married. . . ." There was a pause. . . . "She said most men did. . . ."

The golden-haired one arose before him, and his face flushed. He was shocked and angry.

"And the dangers. . . ." Edith went on.

He withdrew his hands. Edith turned on him.

"Oh, Frank," she cried, "is it true? Is it true?"

He arose from the table and spoke in a blaze of anger.

"Never speak of this again! It ain't a subject for you! What business has that woman . . . ? I tell you women and men are different! Don't you ever again speak of this."

She, too, arose, a frightful pain in her heart. She had offered him her dearest confidence; she had offered him her inmost soul: and he had roughly spurned the offer. She had sought bravely for a true marriage of mind and heart, and he had

shrunk back. This was indeed a new Frank before her.

She spoke in a low voice:

"You had better go, Frank."

"Yes," he cried, "I'd better go!"

He seized up his hat, put it on, and went out. She watched the door close.

Then she sat down in a stupor, her eyes staring, her face pale. A few moments before she would have forgiven him anything —no matter what his past was. But now —well, that was over with! He had come into her life, and gone out of it. It must be for the best. She felt frozen, stupid, inert. The blow had stopped her heart.

And then the door opened and Miss Roth came in.

"Your mother wants to speak to you."

"My mother? Oh, my mother! Miss Roth!"

She arose, groping out with her hands, and Miss Roth drew her to her heart.

Edith laughed strangely.

"I almost forgot about my mother!"

CHAPTER IX

NIGHT

"MY Edy," murmured the mother, stroking the girl's hand.

But Edith's frozen heart could not feel. She had passed beyond all emotion, like one in a trance. She whispered:

"Mother!"

"I—I could want to talk to you," the mother cried softly, "I got much to say . . . but I can't, Edy."

"I understand."

The mother's voice came broken and raspy.

"You was always my baby. . . . I remember the night you was born, Edy . . . when your father, *selig,* saw it was a little girl, he cried, he was so happy. Two boys was enough. . . ."

"Yes, Mother."

"I'm so glad I got you now," the mother went on, struggling for breath, "it makes it not so hard . . . you always loved your mother, Edy. . . ."

"Always . . . always. . . ."

"Ach, I know. No matter what troubles I got with Sam and Marc, there was never any trouble with you. . . . You always helped me, and made me laugh. . . ."

"I wish I had been a better girl."

"Maybe I could have been a better mother. God knows . . . but I tried so good I can . . . I worked and worked to make my children grow up good and happy. . . . And it make me proud all over, you get so beautiful, Edy. . . ."

"Yes, Mother. . . ."

"Oh, my Edy . . ." she stroked the hand softly.

There was a silence.

"Is it a nice day?"

"Beautiful, sunny, warm."

"Oh, my Edy!"

Deep was the silence over mother and daughter. Then the mother went on with poignant sadness:

"I'm glad to live to see you get a good man . . . that's all I wanted . . . a good man for my Edy . . . only I could have liked to see a little new baby, a little grandchild, what call me grandmother . . ."

Edith could hardly speak.

"Yes, Mother."

"Edy."

"Yes."

The voice was seriously sweet and intimate:

"When you get a baby, then you know what it is to be a mother . . . then you will know what your mother was, and maybe love her more and more. . . ."

"I will."

There was a deep, sweet silence.

"So . . . my throat is shut like . . . I could hardly breathe. . . ."

But she laughed softly.

"Come here!"

The daughter leaned over, and the old arms drew her closer and closer!

"Oh, oh—Edy! Kiss me!"

Their lips met.

"My baby!"

Edith slowly withdrew.

"So . . . tell the nurse . . . quick. . . . Good-by. . . ."

"Good-by. Shall I go?"

"Please, Edy . . . tell the nurse. . . ."

Edith stole from the room.

"Miss Roth! Go to her!"

The nurse went in. Edith sat at the table in the kitchen, wide-eyed, tearless, inert. Her face was white as a sheet, her blue eyes big. Doctor Rast came in softly. Edith nodded.

"How is she?"

"Go in."

He gazed at her a moment, and then went with hot haste to the sick-room. Quiet hung over the little tenement. The moments throbbed and throbbed as they went their way. No one seemed to stir. Earth and air and all souls seemed suspended between death and life. Edith neither felt nor thought.

And then, a soft step . . . the Doctor.

"Edith."

She rose.

"Come in, Edith."

She followed him. The room was in twilight. The nurse was sobbing out in the dim parlor. The dark form of the mother lay on the bed.

Edith stood at the bedside looking down at the quiet clay.

Suddenly two boys groped their way in; they were muttering and babbling they knew not what. Edith turned and saw her brothers. Her heart broke . . . broke. . . .

"Sam!" she cried; "Marc!"

She rushed to them; all three drew together; all three sobbed and sobbed, terrible wrenching sobs.

And then another face appeared, a face contorted with agony.

"Edith! Edith! Edith!"

She flew to him; they flung their arms round each other; they sobbed from their broken hearts.

"Oh, Frank, Frank!"

"My darling!"

The Doctor, with tears flowing, murmured:

"Peace on this house. The Mother is dead."

CHAPTER X

MORNING AGAIN

DEATH has its by-products, and the greatest of these is love. The best of human nature comes from its deep source to the surface; families are reunited; people grow gentle. Someone has vanished from among us. Now we know her as she truly was; the faults are forgotten, the dusty details lost; we see her whole life now, a great human round; we see her soul, miraculous and great. No one will ever fill her niche. Something has gone from us. Something has gone out of our house and our lives.

Now the mystery of life comes home to us. Here is the clay that once was woman. Whither has gone the woman? And to this end each one of us must come; through this strange change each one of us must pass. There will come a moment, real as

this present moment, when each of us will meet the event. What next? Whither? Out of life we are born. Who shall say that we do not pass out into life? Who knows but what this mother is real as ever, the life enduring, the form changing? Who knows but what this air and this room are charged with her? Who knows but what, standing here at the coffin, we are steeped in her?

Gentle were the brothers with Edith; full of love and understanding. Gentle was Frank, renewed and purified. Gentle and wholly forgiving was Edith. Why bother about dusty human problems? Beneath all faults there was the divine. These men and this woman looked on each other now as souls—all human, all the same. They forgot the ugly frailties. And so Edith and Frank met heart to heart, soul to soul, and were each glad that the other lived and was near. In the presence of death all life is holy; we understand that the criminal, too, was a human being, that somewhere in him he carried about all miracles.

Mr. Grupp, the good man, spoke a few words at the head of the coffin the next evening. The brothers and Frank and Edith with bowed heads and open hearts stood about him. He spoke simply, and merely because the need was great, as he looked down on the still face:

"She was a good woman. Thirty years I've known her. She worked hard; she was very kind to people. She suffered much. Not for herself she worked. For her children, for her husband. Now she is gone. We shall never see her any more. She goes again with her husband. She was the best friend I had. Always I could come here and she was glad to see me. Now she will never be here any more." The tears trickled and he let them course without shame. "She never thought of herself, but always of her girl and her boys. The best mother was she I knew. But now she is gone; she is dead. Dust to dust!" And then he spoke fervently in Hebrew, "The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord!"

Friends and relatives called; Frank's

father and mother came, and the little thin woman took Edith to her heart. Zug slipped in, and wept in a corner. Edith went over to him:

"Mr. Zug, soon Frank and I will marry. You will call on us then?"

"God bless you!" said Zug, and went his way with handkerchief to eyes.

Nell came, too, for a moment, and kissed Edith, and called her a brave girl.

And so the two days passed over the darkened parlor, and the little group followed the body to the City of the Dead; ashes fell and flowers; the first spadeful of gravel, like hail on the heart; and the sweet Earth closed over the sweet Earth.

Then came the first empty night, with its gnawing pain, its sense of loss, its hollowness and vacancy. Spite of cheerful talk at supper, spite of gentleness and good humor, the house was empty. The place at table, the void bedroom, the still parlor, all showed a gash of loss. It was a restless night of heartache. But with morning the world cried out to youth again. Work had to be done; people met; hunger awoke

again; the blood took its old stride. The city roared on unconscious of a name lost on the roll-call. The brothers went forth to work; Frank sallied down Grand Street; and Edith was busy with housework. And so all of them were sweetly dustied up with life again; the work in hand loomed large; one after another the divine angels of their natures sank back into the depths; one after another the old imps flew up and broke loose; and human were they, very human again—just people. Yet possibly a streak of something new remained, a new mellowness not quite lost.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE BRIDGE

OF a summer night, the wild-rose (we call her that more for what she was, than is) wandered through the crowded world with Frank. Both were in black, and made a sober and grave couple. Edith took his arm with a sweet trustfulness, and often looked at him, meeting his eyes with steadfast gaze. Wholly had she given herself to him, for she worried no more about theories or the last changes of girlhood, but stepped down to his level and followed him through his world. That world was a very human world, and as our young couple really were young, they found it absorbingly interesting.

A silver moon was aloft again, flooding the streets and making pale glow of the street-lamps; again the children ran, filling

the night with laughter; again the corner stand dispensed green and scarlet liquids; again the girls and boys stood in groups chatting, flirting, rippling with silver mirth. The old, old world! But where was the wild enchantment? Where were the Enchanted Gardens? Where was the golden air and the delirious yearning? Under this moon had sprung the electric bolt that flashed their lives into one. Under this moon had they been young god and goddess treading the mid-spaces, winging the mid-heavens. But spring had deepened into summer; nature was at her ripening; for these two April was gone forever.

Yet how sweeter and simpler was July, rich with moist roots in the soil, green and earthy and real. It was very good to be human beings in this human world, one with its absorbing activities, its joys and pangs and desires. Each season has its own glory. How incomplete would the spring be if nothing ripened! How good is the summer with its promise of brown harvests!

And so they wandered along, glad of

each other, intimate, sweetly close. Just then they passed before an ice-cream saloon, brilliant with electric bulbs, the Summer Night's Palace of the Poor. They paused a moment.

"I'm awfully thirsty," said Edith laughingly.

"Come in, then. I'll blow you!"

"Do you think we ought?"

"Ain't we thirsty?"

"Ain't, Frank?" laughingly.

"Shucks!" he cried; "ain't 's all right!"

So they went in and sat at the marble counter. Overhead whirled the electric fans, wafting gusts of hot air on feverish faces; flies buzzed; the counter was dripping; the dispensers spirted syrup, spooned ice-cream and sizzled in carbonated waters, and then set before the thirsty a sparkling, foamy drink. Edith, glancing in the long mirror before her, saw the reflection of thirsty, tired, drawn faces, girls and boys, men and women. They were drowning in oblivion their hard lives and the hot day. Dawn to darkness many of them had strained and fought against weight and time

and machinery and human beings. They were fagged and feverish. A mother with a baby in her lap was feeding ice-cream to the eager little one, who kept crying:

"More! more!"

Edith laughed softly.

"Do you see it?" she asked Frank.

He looked and smiled.

"Come," she said suddenly, touching his hand, "I want to walk with you, far away! Away by ourselves! Away from everything!"

They wandered down East Broadway to Brooklyn Bridge, and then along the footpath, far out to the high center. There they stopped and leaned at the rail and peered out. Save for the occasional train and trolley snaking by with its glow of gold, here was silence. On the shores two mighty cities climbed twinkling to the horizons, hills of stars. Overhead, in the dim-studded heavens rolled the glory of the moon. Beneath hurried the river, heaving, swaying, with a silver-moonpath. Golden ferries shuttled across, in zones of golden

water. Tugs went puffing steam, visible in moonlight, with lantern glistening gold or red. On ferry-slip the signal lamps were lustrous. It was a wonderfully beautiful night.

The two drew very near, and gazed in silence.

"Do you love me as much as you used to?" whispered Edith.

"More," he said.

"It's different, though," she sighed. A woman regrets the slipping by of the enchantment.

"It's better," said Frank.

"Frank!"

"Yes, sweetheart!"

"Do you know," she put an arm about him, "you are all I have in this world now?"

"All?"

"Yes. I depend so much on you now," she sighed.

"I want you to," said he.

"Oh," she cried, "it's strange to be a woman. I don't like it." Then she

laughed shyly. "Do you know, if it weren't for you, Frank, I'd want to be a man!"

He snorted laughter.

"Why, that's clever!" he cried. "Good for you, Edith!"

"Do you think I am clever—sometimes?"

"Do I!" he whistled.

She was delighted.

"Wait till we're married. Mrs. Lasser will surprise the Mister!" she cried. "Such things I'll cook and sew and fix! And all for you!"

"Edith."

"Yes, dear."

"There are some things I want to tell you."

"Tell me. I'm right here."

He spoke slowly:

"I've saved up over a hundred dollars, and my father is going to give me another hundred."

"Yes," she spoke breathlessly.

"You know," he said slowly, "we can buy furniture on instalment."

"Yes, Frank."

"I've thought we could even get a phonograph, too. You love music, don't you?"

"Yes," she could scarcely speak, "I do."

He paused; then, very slowly:

"Don't you think we could look around for three little rooms and furnish them?"

Tears were trickling. She thought it sweet of him to be so thoughtful; and then, the sudden reality of their own home was too much for a heart greatly tried these last few weeks. She turned to him.

"Oh, Frank, our own home . . . our marriage. . . ."

"Wait, Edith," he said, and took her two hands and looked in her face. "There's been something I've wanted to say . . . wanted to say since our talk that afternoon . . . before your mother died . . . you remember?"

Did she remember? What else so vividly?

"Yes," she said breathlessly.

"Edith," he spoke in a new manly way, "I'm going to be your husband. You must trust me. You must believe in me."

"I do . . . I do," she whispered.

"That woman," he went on, "probably meant well, but women don't know anything about all this. They get a notion in their head and then simply make mischief. She's just made you unhappy. Now I want you to do one thing, Edith."

"Yes . . ."

"I want you to drop this—never speak of it again. For I'm to be your husband, and you must trust to me."

There was a deep silence; soft came the sea-smell from the moon-stirring waters.

"Will you, Edith?"

"Frank," she whispered, "I will! For I know I should love you in spite of anything."

At that moment, curiously, she stood so strongly by Frank, that she turned against Nell with a sense of resentment, and resolved to bother no more with fine words.

"Edith!" he cried; "Edith!"

"Frank!"

They clung together, closer, and with tender passion. Their lips met. He crushed her in his arms. And then, like

flame leaping, their bodies cried for each other.

"Good God!" he cried. "We must get married, Edith!"

"Yes," she spoke with a sharp intake of breath, "we must get married!"

They released each other; they did not dare stay in that place. But back they hurried to the crowded world. New life had broken loose within them; the mighty Power that creates had bent them to its will; fire was in the heart, the brain, the blood. Their time was near at hand.

CHAPTER XII

THE THREE ROOMS

WHAT is more delightful than home-hunting? And more exhausting? You start in early in the morning full of adventurous daring; you wind up at twilight, dazed and drooping. Twenty flats tangle your brain. Every time Edith saw a to-let sign she ran Frank up any number of flights of stairs. But nothing pleased both. These rooms were too dark; those too costly; these other in a bad neighborhood. Finally Edith suggested that they follow the migration northward and settle in the Bronx.

Then came long car-rides and dashes into unexplored territory. Here was light and air and quiet, but not the rich highly-colored life of the Ghetto, not the flow of humanity, the brilliance of packed streets.

Rather rawness, newness, and a brightly-polished squalor. Edith was for light and air, thinking of little children. The East Side was no place for babies, for they died there one out of three. Frank was for the rich life, the excitement, and the familiar haunts.

Nevertheless, one Sunday morning, when they stood in a bright sunny parlor on the fourth floor, up in the 180's—with just a hint of nearby park through the window—they both felt in a flash that this was theirs.

The janitor stood rubbing his hands, and surveying grimly the handsome pair.

"Well, lady and gentleman, you couldn't do better for the money in New York. Look at that steamheat radiator. It's no fake. And them chandeliers—cost ten plunks apiece. And this here bath-room—open plumbing. Take my tip and grab it. There was a party in only an hour ago, highly pleased—coming back in an hour, and take it sure as fate. You take my tip and don't let it go!"

Edith flushed with excitement.

"Some one else wants it?"

"Ah, say," laughed Frank, "that's an old gag."

The janitor was very indignant.

"Don't believe it, eh? All right. But don't you grumble if it's snatched under your nose."

Edith's eyes sparkled. She whispered to Frank.

"What do you think of it?"

"What do you?"

"What? Frank, it's just what I want!"

"Sure?"

"Just look at it—and look out that window. And with a park near! Oh, it's beautiful!"

"All right," cried Frank, "I'm game. Here goes."

"What are you going to do?" cried Edith.

"Take it!"

"Really?" Her eyes grew wide.

"Yes, really!"

"You're sure?"

Frank turned to the janitor.

"We'll take it!"

"That's speaking English, young man!

Now, looky here—rent's twelve per. That means a deposit down."

"How much?"

"Three dollars."

Frank drew out three dollars, and the janitor gave him a receipt. The young couple were red with excitement.

"Now it's ours!" cried Edith.

"Yes, sweetheart, our home!"

"Home!"

And surely it was a glorious moment. They surveyed every nook and corner; they measured the floors; they planned the furniture. They gazed on the little place with loving pride.

A week followed crowded with quick events. There were kitchen utensils, linens, odds and ends, and the furniture to get. Edith's brain grew acute. A hundred dormant housewife powers sprang into life. Frank was delighted with the little woman. And finally one morning they stood in it, and it shone round them stocked with goods.

Sunlight streamed in on them. They had found their cranny in the stormy world, their little cave. Here would they live to-

gether, and who knew what sweet life would laugh in their sunny home? The sacredness of Home, the glory of that habitation which is the refuge and nursery of the race, lifted them again to the miraculous heights.

"Oh," cried Edith, her eyes sparkling with tears, "this is lovelier than I dreamed!"

"It's ours, sweetheart," said Frank, "and it would be beautiful no matter what it was!"

And so their little home stood ready! They fixed their marriage-day for two weeks later. Perhaps some of the wild enchantment came back to them, perhaps out of their fresh memories sprang the old golden air, for their pulses chimed with ecstasy, their blood sang hymns in the white morning and in the starry night. The gates of life stood within reach of hands; two weeks, and they would fling open on the rich landscape of married life. Toward this, they knew now, the last few months had been speeding them. Closer and closer

had the souls grown, and now rapidly they were being woven into one another, to go braiding down the happy years. The wild-rose wore a touch of color in her black; youth blew its buds again in her cheeks; her eyes shed the fair light of girlish days; she was all radiance, grace again. Frank seemed more manly, stronger, nobler. He was very considerate, very thoughtful. He made many good resolves. He knew of old that before a man marries he should be examined by a physician, and, though he was practically well, with but the traces of an old trouble, he made up his mind to see Doctor Rast. That would please Edith, if later she came to know of it. Finally he told Edith she was tired and needed a rest, and as he could not get off for a honeymoon, she must spend a week away before the marriage. Edith laughed at him, but he persisted, so anxiously, so ardently, that more to please him (she would do anything to please him) she packed up and ran off to the mountains.

In the train, with people passing them

up and down the aisle, they embraced passionately.

"I don't want to go!" cried Edith; "I was so happy!"

"Hush!" he said. "Then how much more happy we will be to have each other!"

"You'll still love me? Surely?"

"Love you!"

"And you'll miss me?"

"Every moment!"

"And write every day?"

"Every day!"

He felt her arms about him tight, tight —he felt the pressure of her lips—he felt her hair caressing his forehead—all her presence went swimming through him. He could not let her go. And then came the cry of "All aboard!"

"Good-by!"

"Good-by, good-by! Oh, sweetheart!"

"Good-by!"

He ran down the moving car and turned and waved his hand; she waved her handkerchief. And then he was gone and she was gone.

One week! one week, sweet Edith! Go your way, wild-rose! Soon the last touch of girlishness will vanish, and the great years begin.

CHAPTER XIII

WILD OATS

OMINOUS thunder-clouds rolled over the city. Supper was over and the late light was vanishing yellow in all directions. It had been the sultriest day of the summer. In the gasping humid air death fell broadcast over the city—touching the puny tenement babies, slaying the horses in the baking gutter, everywhere striking the weak. Seventeen cases of sunstroke were listed in the evening papers. Four million people were held as by hands in a moist oven, and were tortured alive. All the city cried out for relief—everywhere the prayer went up for rain.

And now as Doctor Rast sat at the window in his shirtsleeves and as Nell listlessly tried to sew, the flying yellow light was in the street, people struggled dimly

through it, and there were muffled mutterings of thunder in the distance.

"Are you getting any air there?" asked the Doctor.

"Oh, I'm all right!" She put down her sewing. "But don't you think we ought to bring Davy in here? It's too hot in the bedroom."

"Cooler there than here," muttered the Doctor. "Is he asleep?"

"Yes." Nell smiled as mentally she saw him. "Fast asleep, poor boy. The day half-killed him!"

The Doctor sighed.

"Nell, think of all the miserable wretches in the city to-night. The poor, the poor! The bad milk, the stenchant smothering tenements, the dead babies! Think of all the misery, all the misery and pain of this strange world. Why is it? Why is it?"

Nell said nothing, but thought of green hills and cool-waved ocean, and her little son caught in the stone city. Sharply then, making the room vivid, came a flash of lightning followed by a crash as of the house collapsing. Nell leaped up.

"Davy'll wake! He'll be terribly frightened!"

She hurried out into the shadows of the inner rooms.

The Doctor sat back, full of a bitter mood. It seemed as if Nature were ready to utterly crush her children to-night. All day she had drained them of strength and heart; now she was venomous and wrathful, and loosened down upon them. A shape passed in the street the Doctor thought he knew and a moment later there was a knock on the door. The Doctor had not the heart to put on his coat. He arose anxiously, stepped to the door and flung it open. Frank stood before him.

"Who is it? Frank Lasser?"

"Yes, Doctor."

"Come in—there's nothing the matter?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing much!"

He followed the Doctor in. Neither cared much for the other; it was a bad evening; and Frank, besides, was lonely. For the wild-rose was on the mountain pastures—infinities away.

The Doctor moodily pushed an armchair

next the desk, and Frank sank into it. Then the Doctor lit the light low, and sat down.

"How's Edith?"

"Edith?" Frank spoke with a touch of feeling. "She's away, Doctor—off in the mountains for a week. I'm glad of it—this weather."

"Yes," the Doctor muttered, "it's a bad day for people."

Frank cleared his throat. He found difficulty in beginning. He spoke in a low voice:

"Doctor."

"Yes."

"I thought I'd drop in——"

"That's all right."

"About myself."

"Yourself? Under the weather?"

"Well," Frank laughed strangely, "not exactly. You see we're to be married in a little over a week."

The Doctor leaned near, and spoke tenderly:

"I'm glad to hear it—I'm really glad to hear it. It'll make *her* happy. I'm mightily glad, Lasser."

There was a pause; Frank gathered his courage.

"Doctor."

"Yes."

"I've been told a man ought to be looked over before he's married."

"Right!"

"Well——" he paused, "I know it ain't your office hours—but could you now?"

"Of course! of course!"

He arose and deliberately locked the door, closed the shutters, and turned the light higher.

A little while later, Frank, leaning forward in his chair, watched the Doctor peering with wrinkled face into the microscope. There was a flash of lightning bursting even through the shutters and a dreadful booming of thunder. The Doctor felt the lightning in his heart. He thought of the wild-rose; he thought of this young man before him. For some time he could not speak. It seemed too awful.

Then Frank burst out:

"Well, Doc."

The Doctor looked up and spoke under his breath:

"You've had your fun, Lasser, haven't you?"

"Yes," Frank tried to speak lightly, "I've sown my wild oats. I've gone around with the boys a bit."

The Doctor leaned close.

"When did you first get this?"

"Oh, about four years ago—a woman out West."

"Who treated you?"

"Some old chap—read his ad in the paper. Claimed I was cured for life."

The Doctor's voice cut sharp and awful, a knife of keen pain.

"Lasser, he never cured you."

Frank could not believe his ears; he felt a great hand smiting him down.

"Never cured me?" he echoed; then anger swept him. "That's rot."

The Doctor leaned closer and spoke slowly, tapping the table:

"You are going to take my word in this. This thing has run on and on—it's become chronic. You were never cured."

There was a silence; now the wild rain was rattling on pave and window.

"Lasser," said the Doctor, "you will have to be treated again!"

Frank clutched the arms of his chair; his heart seemed to stop short; his face was white.

"You mean," his voice was hollow and strange, "I've got to be doped five or six weeks again?"

"I'm afraid it will be more than that."

"More than that?"

"It may take months——"

"Take months?"

"Lasser, I'll tell you—you've got to know the whole truth. I can't set any time limit. It might run on a year."

Frank gave a loud cry:

"A year?"

He half rose in his chair:

"My God—this horrible thing—this shame—But it's nonsense!"

The Doctor gently pushed him down:

"You look this thing in the face, Lasser!"

Frank sat back, trembling. Oh, the sweet wild-rose! the dreams! the gates of happi-

ness! The Doctor, too, thought of Edith. His eyes grew dim; he leaned near; he could barely speak the cruel truth, the killing truth.

"You know what it means?"

"What?" groaned Frank.

"It means," the Doctor spoke as if one word at a time, "that until you are absolutely cured—you cannot marry."

Frank sat forward, face contorted, lips twisted.

"You tell me why."

In the rattle of rain, the white of lightning and the crash of thunder, he heard the doom of the wild-rose. Her last kiss was still on his lips; her arms about his neck.

"I'll tell you," said the Doctor, speaking as a father who had to hurt his son, "because of Edith—Yes, even if you seem perfectly well—all her life she may be an invalid—a broken woman—or even worse. And then the children—your children, Edith's children—possibly she may not be able to have any, or if she has," he paused, his voice was tragic, "they may become blind. That," he cried, "is what comes of

sowing wild oats. The harvest is ruined innocents, ruined women and children."

Frank could not breathe or think; his brain seemed stunned. The world was wild now, and lunatic.

"You mean to say——" he broke off and was silent.

A fearful roll of thunder shook the room. Frank gave a loud cry again; he had to defend the deathless Past.

"Why—why—I only did what they all do——"

"Not all!" put in the Doctor.

"Then they do something as bad."

"Not all of them!"

"Then they're not human."

"Perhaps."

There was a pause, and the Doctor spoke in a far-away voice:

"The young men—they think they have to—they think it's a physical necessity. It's not—the double standard is a lie, a lie!"

The young man was caught in a trap; and so, a wild anger came to his rescue. He struck the desk with his fist:

"Why, it's crazy—it's rot—a little thing

like that—why, I'm all right—I'm practically well—I know lots of men who get married——"

He stopped, face fearfully haggard, his body wet with sweat.

There was a stifling silence, through which rain poured, lightning flashed, thunder rolled. The city was in the clutch of a mighty storm. And then the Doctor, looking on this broken young man, and thinking again of the wild-rose, felt his heart twisted with pain and pity. He smiled sadly, leaned, and quietly took Frank's hand in both of his.

"Frank."

"Yes, Doctor."

"For Edith's sake"—his voice broke—"you are going to face this terrible thing."

Frank said nothing.

"For I know that you do not want to be as other men—go on sowing wild oats—and ruin that sweet girl. Would you do that to her you love—love so deeply?"

Frank looked away.

"Think of her—so wildly sweet, so pure, so fresh. She ought to be happy, have her

own home, her little children, and the good health that fills the day with joy."

The Doctor told Frank nothing new; with his own eyes he saw the wild-rose; in his own heart he held her, held her and her very life. Edith! And then the Doctor went on quietly:

"And if you and Edith had a little child —your own child—a little living human being—your own baby—shall it go through life blind? Did you ever see little blind children—so utterly pathetic, so lost in darkness, groping and reaching and trying to play? The world is full of such children. Shall your child be that way? Shall it? . . . Frank?"

Frank's head sank. The Doctor went on tenderly:

"I'm telling you the whole truth—candidly, brutally—because there is enough suffering and sorrow in this world, because enough women are going through this moment in pain, because of *her,* Frank. Do you want to make the world darker and unhappier? Is that the way you love Edith?"

Frank's head sank on his arm on the

desk. There came from him a low, tearing cry:

"Doctor."

The Doctor was silent a moment.

"Yes, Frank."

"Doctor—*Doctor!*"

"Yes—Frank."

"I can't stand it—I can't stand it!"

There was a silence again. Then suddenly the last few months swept like a vision through Frank's heart. He raised his flushed face and clenched his fist.

"She's been making a decent fellow of me—I was rotten before, rotten—she's making something of me—I'm all changed—and she—if you knew how she loves me. Oh, I never knew any one could love like that! God, and she's so happy, you never saw a girl like it"—he suddenly gave a cry—"our three little rooms, our home—*Doctor!*"

The Doctor leaned forward and spoke in a queer voice:

"Your three little rooms? Have you taken a flat?"

Frank put his hands to his face:

"It's all ready! Everything's ready!"

"You poor children," murmured the Doctor.

Then Frank lifted his face, and cried hoarsely:

"Don't you see? Don't you understand? I can't back out now! I can't hold this up! Everybody knows it—we've told all. What excuse could I give? What reason? What can I tell Edith? Good God, do you think I could tell her this? She's a sweet, pure girl——"

"I think," said the Doctor slowly, "she would understand. Women understand where babies are involved."

Frank blazed with anger:

"Don't you speak of telling *her!* I won't stand for it!" And then his voice went wild again: "Just ask her to wait? to wait and wait? It will break her heart. And all for what? Because I'm human, because I'm human! Oh!"

His head sank down. The Doctor put an arm about him and drew him close.

"Frank"—his voice was pure with its tenderness, its compassion—"I know. Life

is a real danger, strong as dynamite, sharp as a knife-blade—if we play with it, and that's what sin is, we are apt to be blown to pieces or slashed and stabbed. The world isn't a stage and all the men and women merely players—real blood flows, real torture tears the heart, real hearts break, real death annihilates us. And only a real man can grapple with this real life. Are you a real man, Frank?"

There was a silence again. And then Frank broke away from the Doctor and rose and clenched his fist. His eyes had a dash of wildness in them, his face trembled with passion.

"You want to break Edith's heart—why, just when she is so happy and I so changed —to have a thing like this happen. I'll not bear it. I don't believe it. I'm well—don't I feel all right? There's nothing the matter with me! I bet some other doctor—— It's a matter of luck, anyway, and I've been lucky, I'm always lucky. Why, no one could get married if this were so. It's tommy rot, it's womanish. A man must go ahead, he must risk something——"

"Yes," the Doctor broke in quietly. "Himself. But are you going to risk Edith, and Edith's children?"

Frank came close to him and all the frenzy of his passion poured with his voice:

"But I'm crazy for her—I must have her!"

The Doctor suddenly arose, a pain of hot anger in his heart. He seized Frank by the arm and looked in his face:

"You dare to speak like that, Frank? I tell you you're an irresponsible boy yet—you've been playing, you're a pleasure-seeker; you don't know what life means. You don't know anything about pain and sorrow. You haven't suffered enough yet. You don't understand women—women who bear the burden of this world, the commonest in the street suffering pangs a man can't dream of, who make men of us, and men of little children, who give themselves to us soul and body. And you would take a pure woman and basely defile her, spoil her body, and darken her days and nights! Frank, I tell you you're a boy yet! Crazy

for her! You must have her! You shall not have her, not yet! It would be better if you went down to the river to-night and threw yourself in!"

Frank stared at him, his face pale.

"How will you stop me?" he asked hoarsely.

"How stop you?" the Doctor spoke sharply. "I'll have Nell speak to Edith."

"Speak—to—Edith?"

"Yes, Frank, she shall!"

Frank's voice rose.

"I'm your patient—you're sworn as a doctor not to tell your patient's secret—you're sworn to it. I know what I know!"

The Doctor looked at him strangely.

"Frank," he murmured slowly, "there are times for breaking even oaths."

He dropped Frank's arm and paced up and down the room. Wild was the storm, shaking the room, dashing the panes with rain. Frank sank into the chair, crumpled up in it. His face was fearfully white and looked frightened. He kept wetting his lips together.

The Doctor took his seat again; his face was full of trouble; he gave Frank a searching glance; he spoke very low.

"Frank."

"What you want?"

"Frank," he seized the young man's hand again, "you're in trouble, in deep waters. Let's be sensible. Let's see this thing with both eyes. You say that this love for Edith —this deep, great love for a sweet, true girl—has been making a man of you, a woman of her. Then it hasn't been wasted; it's worth while even to love—and lose. But you won't lose. Go away. Leave her; go traveling again. Go for a long while. And this great love will go on working in your lives—you will be all the better for it, all the nobler and happier, knowing that you have sacrificed, sacrificed for her. And then, Frank, when the time comes, you can offer her a true and a good man and be as happy as you dream. You know Edith will wait for you—gladly, gladly!"

But Frank cried out sharply:

"It can't be done! It's too late! What if you were engaged—if you were just at

the gates of your happiness—if you had waited and waited for this—if you loved as Edith and I love—if everyone knew—if your home was all ready—could you break it off? Could you wait? Talk's cheap. But, think, it's the happiest time of our life—such a time will never come for Edith again. Oh," he moaned, "it will break her heart."

"Yes," the Doctor went on softly, "but if you marry her now, Frank, and troubles come thick and fast upon you, and the first bloom of love fades off, and everything becomes commonplace, and your wife is complaining and sickly, and there is a sick or a blind child, will you be so crazy for her then? Will she be so happy then? You don't know what marriage means, how much it demands from a man and a woman, what sacrifices, what service, what unselfishness. And then when you realize that the fault is yours, and that it is too late to mend it—that you have only made the world darker for your living in it, and visited your sins on your children and on your wife, then you will wonder, Frank, why

you ever dreamed of marrying. Don't talk to me of too late and everyone knowing it and the shame. It's not too late to save Edith and Edith's children. That's the only thing to think of. Come, you'll give Edith up now; you'll go away."

Frank arose; his face struggled; he gulped as if he were strangling, and the Doctor standing, thinking again of the wild-rose, gripped the boy's arms:

"Frank—Frank—tell me!"

"I can't stand it," said Frank. "I love her so."

The Doctor leaned close to the boy.

"Love her more then—love her enough to save her—save her from you!"

Frank said nothing.

"Will you? Yes or no?"

And then Frank cried:

"Give me time to think. This has all come so of a sudden." Then suddenly he burst out: "It's too late—it's impossible—I'm well"—and then he smiled haggardly and added—"give me time, Doctor."

The Doctor smiled sadly:

"Take your own time, Frank. Go! Now you're all right!"

Frank steadied himself, he was reeling like a drunkard. The Doctor, at the door, leaned low:

"I only want you children happy. Edith is one of the loveliest I know."

Frank nodded his head, gulped, the Doctor patted him on the back, and then shut him out in the storm. He dashed into lightning.

Then the Doctor unlocked the other door and went back to his desk and sat chin on palm. His mind seemed to deepen down into the very springs and subterranean currents of life, all the mysteries of existence closed over him like storm and heat. He felt himself mixed in with a world of much agony and strife, and all was so real that it sent a pain into the recesses of his heart. And then he thought of the wild-rose, and all the wild-roses of this world, so early blighted, the sweet possibilities unfulfilled. Truly the tragedy of this Earth is the wasted possibilities!

Nell opened the door and came in carrying Davy in her arms. The little fellow, in his nightdrawers, was staring curiously and was wide awake. He pointed to his father.

"Thunder, daddy!" he cried.

The Doctor looked up with blinded eyes.

"Why, Morris," Nell exclaimed, "you look like the end of the world!"

"Nell," he muttered, "the misery and pain of this world! I'm sorry for poor people, and I'm sorry for sick little children, and I'm sorry, sorriest for the women. It seems as if they always had the raw end of the deal!"

The storm drowned his voice.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WHIRLWIND

FRANK plunged wildly into the night, and rushed he knew not where. Without umbrella or coat, with straw hat jammed down over his forehead, with jacket flapping in the wind and head bent low, and fists clenched, he flew through the empty streets like a Fury, alone with the storm. For miles he flew, callous to the rain that soaked and drenched him, that splashed his face and closed his eyes. The whole city huddled under the loosened elements, but this human being laughed at the might of the heavens. What if the lightning struck him down? He himself was death flying through the city.

Death! Death of all things! Death of all that made life. What is life without the things dearest to us? What is life without

love or hope or joy or vision? Mockery of the Fates! They drive a free man into sweet bondage, and then rob him of the sweet. The bondage remains; the prisoner writhes and struggles in the coils; he cannot escape; he is alone; he cries out; he lifts his hands; the heavens? They send lightning and storm upon him, beat him down, ruin him.

When the mad passion of sex-love seizes a man, has he not for the time a sweet insanity? He cannot see things sensibly; he cannot reason. *This night* he must have the woman! To wait a day even is torture unendurable. The moments separate; each one is a trial and a durance. Wait for Edith? Wait months? Wait years? As well never marry, as well die at once.

What a world! At first a playground; then a pleasure palace; then an Enchanted Garden—but now? Even as the lightning revealed vivid stretches of avenue, so the world stood naked this night. A mad hell of struggling souls, whipped by the whirlwind, stung and lashed by a rain of fire, split through the heart by the lightnings

of pain and hate and failure, drowned in the mocking thunder! Could there be a god in such a mad-house? No—save a mad God, a merciless God, a divine cynic playing with puppets.

What had he done that he merited this? Had he not gone the way of the world? Had he not followed the teachings of the street? Had he not been ignorant? To punish ignorance is to punish innocence. How can we help what we don't know? No one had ever taught him, no one warned him. Why, they had patted him on the back and told him to go out and be a man. They had told him that until he had made the rounds he had not reached manhood. And so he had gone.

Women of old arose and danced through the night at his side. The golden-haired one was there, laughing like a waterfall, loosing her harsh, sweet music. These had taught him life, these had taught him *Woman*.

Why, it was wildly absurd. The Doctor was wrong. Men like the Doctor are fanatics. They go too far. And they are ig-

norant. What do they know of the world?

Was he sick? Did he carry a peril in his body? Was he a danger? Mad! mad! who could believe such a thing! Wouldn't he feel pain if there was a real trouble? Wouldn't he be weak and crippled? He knew. He had been through it long ago. He was all right. He was well and strong.

Who can go against Nature? It was Nature all these years that had driven him into vice. Who can go against her? And what is natural is right. Now Nature was driving him into marriage; Nature with her fatal hands was drawing a man and woman together; they had to serve her purposes; they could not resist; they could not push off a finger; slowly, surely, inevitably closer and closer they came. Now they were at the very verge of marriage. What could stop them? Who could go against Nature? And what is natural is right.

Came a vivid vision of the three little rooms, the new furniture, the sunlight streaming on Edith's head. Oh, the overrunning happiness! Oh, the cup trembling at the very lips! The gates, the golden

gates of happiness within reach of the hand!

Edith had said:

"I didn't dream it would be so lovely."

He had answered:

"It's ours—it would be beautiful no matter what it was!"

He felt the pressure of her lips, the passionate hug of her arms in the train. Again those last wild words—the good-by.

She had cried in his ear:

"I don't want to go away! I was so happy!"

"Hush!" he had said; "think of how much happier we will be to have each other!"

"You'll still love me? Surely?"

"Love you!"

"And you'll miss me?"

"Every moment!"

"And write every day?"

"Every day!"

Oh, the wild-rose, the sweet face, the trust in him. She was coming back in a week; they were to be married; they were to go into the little home; *their* home. Every evening he would come home to her;

they would sit opposite at table; their lives would be woven and woven into one another, and go trailing beautifully down the years. Who could stop them? Who could withhold the glory promised? Who would hold the wild cup to their lips and then dash it to the ground as they reached trembling to taste of it?

But now? Hideous was the world! Hidden in it were poisons and death-dealing drugs. Terrors lurked behind the beautiful face of Nature. Under the skin lay earthquake and volcano. Hideous!

He was caught in a trap. He had ignorantly sown the wind, and now the whirlwind was sweeping him to ruin. But not only him. The wild-rose! The wild-rose torn from the sunny soil and blown away into the dark, deathly gorge.

"This will kill her," he cried. "This will kill her!"

He had no excuse to offer her. Tell her the truth? Never! She would shrink from him, as from a thing tainted. She would shudder in his presence, a girl so

pure and sweet and innocent. She would learn to hate him. That would end all.

He racked his brain. What could he tell her? Had he lost his position? He could get another. Was he sick? That was absurd; she knew he was well. Could he withhold the reason, and tell her to trust to him? She would demand the truth; she would think he had ceased to love her. What reason was there after taking the little home and furnishing it?

"Go to her," cried his heart; "go to her, and trust to your instincts to explain!"

Wild advice! He knew that if he saw her face, that if he touched her lips with his, that if once her arms were about him, all was lost. He had not the strength to look on her and depart.

The Doctor's words flew back to his mind. He tried to shut them out. They persisted in coming. They stormed upon him, they cried out, they were heard—heard loudly. Edith an invalid—Edith a broken woman—and the baby!

Could it be blind—their baby? Hor-

rible! That surely would break Edith's heart! Come! he must be a man! He must swallow the bitter medicine! How dared he think of passion?

So then—it was all over! He would tell Edith—and Edith would plead with him to tell all. And all he couldn't tell. That would break it all up. Yes, he must renounce Edith. He must release her utterly. He must go his own way. This then is the end of the wild enchantment and the golden days! This is the end of it.

He saw the black and bitter years ahead—he saw Edith growing old alone, her love for him turned to hate, her dreams shattered—a withered and dried single woman! He saw himself plunging again into vice, drowning his sorrow—a long, empty, cynical life.

Impossible! Why must this be?

Because a fanatic had told him he was a peril. It was a lie! a lie! He knew better. There was Julius Neuman, he remembered, who had had the same trouble and married. Why, he had three children—three lusty

children—and his wife was strong and happy.

Frank laughed. The Doctor was crazy! He was making a mountain of a mole-hill. Who can go against Nature? Nature is always right. Go with her, not against her.

Laughing harshly he turned homeward. He thought he had solved the trouble. He thought it was all over.

But then with redoubled fury the whirlwind awoke again. Try as he would he could not drown out the downright sense of the Doctor. His mind told him that he didn't know all about Julius Neuman. His mind told him that the Doctor handled such facts every day, and knew.

Wild was his heart again! He saw the wild-rose torn and trampled in the mud. He saw his own life crashing about him. But he had to have her; he was crazy for her. Waiting even a week was nearly unendurable.

He clenched his fists again; he raged; he drove like a demon. Vivid lightnings struck open the heavens and tore night out

of the streets; thunder boomed through the rushing air. Up the stairs of the Henry Street tenement he dashed, flung open the door of his home, and slammed it to.

His mother cried out:

"Frank? Is it you?"

He did not answer. He slammed the door of his own room. He sat down on the bed in the blackness. Water poured from him, splashing the floor. He was almost insane. He could not bear the fire in his breast, the fever on his forehead and cheeks.

"Good God!" he cried hoarsely. "Good God!"

The door opened gently; someone entered.

"O God! God!" he cried; "I'm going crazy!"

A gentle hand touched him; a gentle voice spoke:

"Frank."

He did not answer.

"Has something happened to Edith?"

He laughed harshly. His mother began to cry, with soft sobs:

"Frank, Frank!"

She drew his head to her heart, she patted his cheek. Something broke down within him; he was very weak. He did not resist.

"Oh, Mother," he moaned, "what shall I do?"

"What is it, Frank?"

"I can't tell you!"

They were silent. His mother stooped and kissed him.

"Do what is right, dear. My poor boy! my poor boy!"

She was gone. He grew calm, as in a trance. He arose and lit the gas; sat down at his little table, and took pen and paper.

"My darling," he began writing, "never doubt that I love you with my very soul, and would rather die than harm you. We cannot marry yet. You mustn't ask for the reason—I am not allowed to tell. You must trust to me—trust absolutely. Perhaps it will only be for a short time——"

He paused, pen in air. He saw the wild-rose reading these strange words; he saw her pale, perhaps swooning away. It was

like stabbing her with a knife. No, no, no! Darling Edith! He could not hurt her! He could not harm her!

"No," he said quietly, "I will go to her. She is wise and good. I will tell her like a child; she will forgive me like a mother!"

Long and long he lay, even until the dawn broke white and clear—lay in a strange peace; knowing that Edith was wise and good.

And that next day he took train and went to her, with forewarning of a telegram. She met him at the station—and how brown she was—how beautiful with the sun and the wind! How fresh and girlish again! She was wildly happy. He had come, she knew, because he could not stay away from her. Glorious was that evening. He could not bring himself to break into her wonderful happiness. Calm and quiet, he let her walk him under the stars.

And then that night she whispered:

"Let's climb the mountain in the morning! See the sunrise from the mountain top!"

That was his chance. Up there in the

clear dawn he could speak. So they planned to meet before the house at four in the morning, and they parted, kissing passionately, drowsy with the glory of their love.

CHAPTER XV

SUNRISE

THEY met in secret at the pasture bars across the road. In the dim light and still ecstasy of nature they stole on each other like ghosts. And then—fresh dewy lips, cool enwinding arms—and new enchantment. They were children of the city, children of noise and stone. But here was eternal quiet and the beauty that walks in the heart. Close were they at last to Mother Earth, and she sent through them her vital might and drew them passionately together.

"Oh, Frank, Frank," whispered Edith, "we were never so near each other, so near, so near!"

In that moment bliss overcame him and he forgot all else.

"Edith—sweetheart!"

For long they stood thus, and then silently went through the pasture toward the still woods. A sea of mist lay on the ground about them, a foot deep, and through the mist here and there, like stars, floated a daisy. A ghostly light was everywhere. A waning moon stood over the mountain. The air was very pure, fragrant with Earth, cool and caressing.

Into the wilderness, along an upward trail they wandered, Frank walking before. How wild! how still! how deep! Dawn was not; only the ghostly light, only the waning moon. They picked their way over dead logs and stones and branches; twigs snapped wet in their faces.

How wonderfully alone they were! In the shadows about them only a leaf here and there rustled; they heard the noise of their own footsteps. Fresh were the wood-smells, poignant with dew; and a mighty expectation seemed to brood in the still air. They paused once to listen to the plaintive call of the wood-owl, and then went on, witchery stealing over their hearts. It was too beautiful for words.

Then, "Listen," whispered Edith.

It was the fresh liquid thunder of rushing water, shaking the air with music. It lulled them both, soothing Frank's heart. He was steeped in new miracles; he could think of nothing else. Suddenly, at a twist of the trail the mountain torrent roared beside them, a tumbled whiteness under the last few stars of dawn.

"Oh, Edith," he breathed, clasping her hand.

They stood in silence.

But there were no words in the face of this. So they went on, climbed a steep slope, and then paused, thrilling with grandeur. Empty space fell under them. They were at the edge of a cliff, from which, at their side, sprang a towering pine jutting into the sky. Beneath them lay a wild gorge—chaos and ruin of rocks and wild vegetation, the torrent leaping white here and there. Far opposite arose the mountain. The waning moon peered under the pine-boughs.

Enchantingly wild was the scene, and as they stood hand in hand the faint wind of

dawn lulled them; leaves rustled; needles fell. Then it was gone. But how good the smell of the pines and the damp earth! How still the cool air! How wild the scene!

"Oh," whispered the wild-rose, "who could have dreamed of this! And that we should have it—together! I think my heart would break now if you weren't here!"

"Edith!"

Sadness seized him. Was this the last morning, here, in the wilderness, the beautiful wilderness? Love smote him; he wished he could clasp her, and that in one another's arms they might hurl themselves to death in the rocky gorge.

"Edith!"

He felt her arms about him again, and brush of dewy-sweet lips and electric wafture of hair. They grew drowsy with the glory. All the passion of the Earth pulsed through them, all the primordeal joy of creation.

A tear, not his own, ran down his cheek.

"Sweetheart!" he cried, holding back to see her face. "So happy?"

The wild-rose could not speak. Her eyes were shining at the lashes; two tears were trickling down.

"Tell me," he whispered.

"Our love," was all she could say.

She trembled close to him; a strange shudder passed through them both together, as if all their nerves were joined in one body, an aching ecstasy. Forgotten was the wilderness and the gorge; forgotten all, save this.

They turned away, faint with love. Frank felt himself weakening. He was overcome with trembling beauty. Onward they went, crossing where the torrent ran narrow, climbing the mountain through the pine-forest. As upward they strove, aiming as toward some victory, some wild goal, they could not see the world beneath, but only here and there glimpses of the pale sky. And then they came to a high slant of weathered rock, scaled it, and came out at the top of a grassy clearing, where, right beyond, a blue mirror in the wilderness, lay a little rain-water lake, hung in mid-heaven, circled with pines.

Clasping hands the city-children gazed till their eyes were dim. Then they turned. Wonder weakened them. They cried out together. For the Earth was unrolled at their feet. Far as eye could see ran the mountain ranges, lifting out of valleys of white mist. Up the high slant of skies the golden heralds of dawn were running; mighty blew the gale in their faces; wild exhilaration stung them. They were alone on the heights of the world! They were alone—free!

But the wind was cold.

"Edith!"

"Oh, Frank!"

He spread his coat out with his right arm.

"Come in under!"

She nestled under, and he wrapped her close. They stood as one, warmer for the contact, and he felt her living heart beating at his side.

"Oh," she cried, "I can't speak, Frank! I just love and love and love you!"

Ecstasy swept them. And then their eyes saw the miracle of the dawn. Far in the

Eastern skies that flush of purple; far on the valleys that purple flush. Swift on horizon, splendor of scarlet and bubbling yellow. Vast overhead the lift and spread of the paling heavens. And then on the Eastern rim a snake of fire; a riot of color; a thrill as of a curtain lifting; flame, flame——

"The sun!" they whispered breathlessly, "the sun!"

How could city-children know of such glories? They were gathered in the heart of revelations. Fire leaped from each to each. And lo, the mists were blown from the valleys; the sky swam blue; voices ran hither and yon in the forest; the whole Earth seemed to shake itself, awake, and shout, and quiver, and laugh. They saw lakes lying silver among the hills; they saw one broad fruitful valley, the dissimilar green of barley, wheat, and rye-fields; barns and houses, smoke lifting from chimneys; straggling gray stone-walls. Far away they saw a dusty road and a boy driving cows. Hens were in a barnyard about

a woman scattering bran; a horse loped lazily over a pasture, and then——

"Look!" cried Edith.

A lonely eagle soared in the blue, lost now and then in the sun.

Behind them sang a bluebird, pouring the sunrise into song.

He felt her heart beating sharply at his side; he saw the radiance and distinctness of the Earth; he breathed the glory-freshened air. He was trembling with passion. Edith's life was gliding into his. It was too late, too late. . . . She was his, his. . . .

And then she stood free of him, trembling. He saw the wind blowing the hair over her forehead, he saw her eyes confronting sunrise with sunrise, the blowing skirts, the freshness and fragrance of the wild-rose. She was his . . . his. . . .

"Edith!" he seized her hand.

"Come away from this," she murmured.

They stepped back to the little lake and stood on the moist grassy ground facing the waters. For some time they were silent, as

the morning grew. He tried then to think clearly. "No, no," cried his heart. "Trust to instinct! Trust to Nature!" The sun rose higher; the sky was of the tenderest blue; the warm smells of Earth blew over them; insects buzzed and hummed in the grass; the bluebird sang, and softly the lake-water lapped on the pebbly shore.

Suddenly she felt it—the secret. Earth yearned; the sun like a male embraced the female Earth; two thrushes fluttered about their nest in the pine; two squirrels chased over the ground; and now there were two eagles in the blue. It was the sacred fire of creation, raimenting the Earth with new life—with babies and fruits and cubs—and everything sang and dripped and ran and sparkled with the glory. The two human beings drew close together; the man forgot his message; forgot the world; he thought only of this woman. For this they were alive; toward this had they been doomed. How could a thing so sacred be wrong?

He drew closer to her. She was so rich and living! Music wrapt them, creation

stirred in them. They were lost to all save each other.

"Edith."

"Frank."

He took both her hands, he drew her till their faces were close.

"I love you!" he whispered.

She spoke tremulously:

"Will you love me forever?"

"Forever."

"Ever and ever?"

"Forever and forever!"

His arms drew her closer; their lips met; they cried out; they stood thus silent, motionless. The blue bent nearer, the birds sang, the leaves rustled, needles fell on them, the lake-water rippled dreamily. They were overcome with love, a long glory.

Whispered Edith at last:

"If you should die now I should die now."

Sacred was this love, indeed. He groaned inwardly. How could he blast this beauty? And then for a moment he was

in the clutch of a wild struggle. Tell her he must; had he not come up for this; tell her he must, whatever the consequences. Was he so weak? Was he so unmanly? Was his love so earthly a thing? The morning began to darken for him; he released the wild-rose; he stood from her, gazing on the grass.

"Frank," she whispered, taking his hand, "what is it?"

"Nothing!" he murmured.

He felt it would be better to die than to pour into her ears the poison that would kill her happiness. In a few minutes their love would be shattered, their lives broken. He could see her face piteous and drooping; he could hear her wild cry. How could he speak? Why had he come? Why had he not written? And here she was, so real, so vital, his own, his own.

But you must tell her, Frank. Shall you ruin this pure wild-rose? Shall all her beauty go because you are weak?

He moistened his lips.

"Listen," he said, in a strange voice.

"I'm listening," she murmured.

"I must tell you something."

"Tell me."

The moment had come. Listen now, wild-rose, and try to be wise! His tongue was tied, he stood rooted to the ground, his lips were parched.

"Edith!"

"What is it?"

"I want to ask you something."

"Ask me."

Oh, the sweetness of her, the freshness.

"What—if—what if—what if we weren't married for a while yet?"

She spoke with sharp fright:

"What has happened, Frank?"

Could he go on? He delayed the blow.

"Why, nothing," he laughed strangely. "I only wanted to know."

"It's a strange question!" her voice grew sharp again. "Something's happened, Frank. I know it!"

She seized his arm, looked in his face. That touch, that look overcame him. Nature cried out to take her. These two were for one another. Far was the city, far the Doctor; reason grew pale and fled; doubts

vanished. His blood sang again; fire once more fell from the blue and wound them round; wildness was in them, wildness of Earth and sun.

"I only wanted to know," he whispered, "because I—I couldn't wait!"

She loosed silver laughter—utter joy.

"Oh, Frank! Frank! I—I can hardly wait a week!"

He laughed happily; they stepped to the cliff. They looked down on the marvelous world.

"All the world's before us!" he laughed.

"And all of life!" cried the wild-rose. "This is the sunrise of our marriage!"

Wild joy, wild laughter filled them. They were children again. They raced down through the wilderness, they drank of the cool spring, making a cup of Edith's hand; they played tag, red was in their cheeks, and innocence gloried about them. Beautiful were they, and overflowing with life. Away with dark thoughts! Fling off problems and theories! Take the cup and drink of it!

And so Frank was overcome; and so all

darkness fled from his heart; and so he laughed at the Doctor and did not believe him, and knew himself for a well man. He went back to the city that afternoon; he plunged into his work. His mind was free. He was sure of himself. Nature herself had answered his questions.

The next week they were married—Sam giving away the bride, and Mr. Grupp getting the second kiss by force.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PASSING SEASONS

WELL, well, well, what a world! Not only are there queer people in it, but there are also young couples. They're enough to make one sick —so said Mr. Grupp—kissing and hugging and making a show of themselves. Why in the middle of dinner does Mr. Lasser deem it necessary to leap up from his soup, circle the table, and give Mrs. Lasser one on the cheek? Why, when company is present must they needs be spooning on the sofa?

Sam and Marcus paraded up and down the three rooms, chanting:

"Gee whiz! I'm glad I'm free,
No wedding bells for me!"

Said Sam to Frank:

"Come on out with us to-night and have a good time!"

Whereupon Marc chanted:

"I would if I could, but I can't. Why? Because I'm married now!"

"I told you not to kiss so much," said Mr. Grupp from the Morris chair (on which but two instalments have been paid). "One kiss a day, before and after!"

Marc took Frank aside, and spoke secretly:

"Take my advice and never get married. Oh, I beg your pardon. I forgot!"

Mr. Grupp gave the young wife a schnelker, and she swept him out of the room with a broom, a gale of laughter blowing all about her. He nursed a sore knee, groaning, and making impossibly funny faces.

"Oi yoi yoi! Oh, Mamma! such a woman-lady!" And then he declaimed dramatically, "A lion, Mr. Lasser, a tiger, Mr. Lasser, a *rhinoceros,* Mr. Lasser, *even a rattlesnake*—you can tame—but a vomen, never!"

They laughed for old sake's sake.

Frank was very obedient when Edith gave orders.

"Himmel!" cried Mr. Grupp, holding his cheek as if he had the toothache. "That boy is a sie-mandel! (a henpecked half-man)."

"He's all right," said Edith, petting him. "He's the best in all the world!"

"Cut it out!" cried the brothers.

"You should have taken my advice," said Mr. Grupp. "Fifty years engaged, one year married!"

How proudly the young couple showed their place to visitors, displaying kitchen ware and Mission furniture, rug and clock and silver and china. And especially the view! What happy Sunday nights when Mr. Grupp and the brothers and Jonas Zug crowded the table and ate cold slices and pickles and cheese and cake! Zug came regularly now, and had ceased to rave. He had fallen into the comfortable berth of friend of the family, and was always warmly welcome. Everyone liked to call on the Lassers—their little place was so

radiant with their own happiness. One felt the home-feeling as one stepped in; one carried away the glow and warmth of an open hearth fire. The Lassers took people into their home and their heart. Everyone felt instinctively that here was a happy marriage, here was a couple perfectly mated.

Jonas would sit with them till late at night, and all three would remember and laugh over the vanished days.

Edith and Frank never forgot their first supper in the little kitchen. They had been married the night before; all day they had been setting the things to right—hanging and rehanging and rehanging the four pictures till their heads were dizzy—cleaning the floors—placing the furniture—stacking the cupboards. Now in the warm evening they sat down. Low overhead the light glowed over the table and their faces. They sat opposite. The silverware shone; the plates were polished, the food steamed. A noise of people overhead and beneath hinted of many homes. Peaceful and at rest

was the weary world. How alone they were! how human this was! how devoid of passion!

They looked at each other across the table, their eyes met and shone with tears. They felt all the holiness of their home. This air they breathed was hallowed; this food of which they were to partake was sacred. The common lot; the simple human things—all theirs. And each other! They two alone, sundered from all others, alone in their own home. A deep wish sprang in both hearts; the wish to say grace, to ask a blessing on their first supper. But of whom? This younger generation knew no God, and spoke no prayers.

Edith murmured in a low, sweet voice:

"Say something, Frank."

He knew what she meant. They both bowed their heads. Frank spoke tremblingly:

"God, be in our homes, be in our hearts, forever and ever. Amen."

That evening they walked out in the Park, out in the warm darkness and under lustrous stars. How candid they could be

with one another! How much they shared in secret! What dreams they could give each other!

Mornings came—they rose laughingly, they breakfasted, Edith kissed her husband good-by, and waved to him from the window. Evening returned—she heard his step, his whistle, she flew to his arms. He told her the day's news; they took supper; they washed the dishes together; and then they sat and talked, or flooded the rooms with phonograph music, or read the evening papers, or went over their accounts, or walked in the Park.

They were living a beautiful idyl that seemed endless. Quarrels came, too; sharp words, astonishing both; then tears and kisses and hours all the sweeter for the healing and the blessing of love.

Edith became a wonderful manager and Frank declared laughingly that two could live on less than one. But, among the poor, it is always the woman who makes both ends meet. What a world of work—to figure on chops and potatoes and flour and coffee and butter—on gas and coal—on necessities and

luxuries. Every Saturday night Frank handed over an unopened pay-envelope. Edith gave him an allowance, and saved out of the remainder.

"We must save—save—save!" she cried, knowing well enough why.

One trip Frank made in Pennsylvania, and those ten days nearly broke their hearts. Then, by good fortune, he secured a city job and had to travel no more. Their happiness was complete.

And so, as the months glided on the last shadow of doubt and dread passed from Frank's mind. Edith was healthy and happy. The Doctor had had good intentions, but he was mistaken: that was the only explanation. Frank thanked his stars time and again that he had not followed the Doctor's advice. All was well, all was well! He never spoke the Doctor's name in Edith's hearing, and as for Edith, she had forgotten the Rasts entirely. They were lost with the old life in the Ghetto. In this freer, fresher life there was no room for Rasts. For if she did for a moment glance back and remember her old Ideal

and the talk with Nell, she laughed away the memory with her vanished girlhood.

No word came from them, either. The brothers had moved to a boarding house and doubtless the Rasts did not know what had become of the family, and were far too busy to find out. One can move round the corner in the city and be as lost as in remote jungles.

And so the months flew. How time does really fly, lopping off the months, telescoping the years, till, suddenly all the world has changed, old faces gone, new generations upon us, and we ourselves hobbling into mystery! The months flew; the happy marriage deepened; more and more familiar and common were the days, sweeter and realer the relationship. Edith was a woman now, sweet, gentle, mirthful, and busy. Her faults were rather limitations than blemishes. So far as she went, she was all that a woman can be. But she went no further—stopping short of many worlds of thought and action. It was not through lack of possibilities in her nature, but rather her sweet compromise with the nature of

her husband. She keyed herself to his pitch; she met him on equal ground; she came down and enjoyed life with him.

As for Frank, he was attentive, thoughtful, manly in his own way. He never forgot to bring home the little things that delight a woman; he never preferred others before Edith. He worshipped and was proud of his wife.

Then the processes of Nature, vast, miraculous, mysterious, entered into their lives again. Nature not long leaves us to ourselves. One night, late, with the light low, as Edith sat on her husband's lap, laughing strangely, eyes shining, tears glittering, she told him.

"Frank."

"Yes, dear."

"I think——"

"Yes."

She blushed.

"I think"—she hid her head in his shoulder—"I think a little new Lasser is coming!"

A wild thrill went through him.

"A child! Ours!"

So the wonder of Fatherhood and Motherhood awoke in them.

Tender he was with her through the long time, while our great Mother, Nature, was busy with her divine processes. Now Edith would sit and stitch and stitch at sweet little baby-clothes—her eyes shining, her cheeks flushed, her heart beating to the music of the great Mother. How laughingly she brooded on little hands and feet, and imaged out of the air a darling face, a face like her husband's! How hard she tried to think good thoughts, to speak and act divinely. She wanted to be a good woman . . . oh, how good . . . that the child might be good . . . that later she might be a good Mother, and help to create a good man or woman. New powers awoke in her; her face took on a new gravity, a deeper beauty. There was more meaning there. One read there more of life.

One night she spoke of what Doctor they should have.

"Could we have Dr. Rast?"

Frank felt a pang of fear.

"Tut! no! He's too far off, Edith. We

must have some one in the neighborhood!"

"You're sure?"

"I don't think he'd want to do it."

"We could ask him."

He spoke with a touch of anger.

"I don't like him, anyway, Edith. I'd rather you had some one here."

"Whom could we have?"

"Why don't you have a midwife? Everyone else has."

"I don't like them."

"Why not? You know they cost less. Why, it's nothing. It's because it's your first, Edith. Babies are born every day."

For days the argument continued, off and on. Edith finally consented.

As the time grew near, she had her fears —secret fears, known to all women. Her pain, too, she had, nobly borne, quietly concealed. But pain was to be expected. Nothing is created in this world without struggle and pain.

And so the seasons flew, winter gave way to spring, spring to summer, summer to autumn, and the autumn grew red and golden. It was the time of Indian summer.

CHAPTER XVII

INDIAN SUMMER

IT was the time of Indian Summer. Mild was the night; a night golden with harvest and fruition. Frank at the window saw the blood-red harvest-moon, saw it rise across the heavens, saw it sink low and large and disappear.

He was in his coat-sleeves; not for a moment could he sit still, but wandered like a caged tiger up and down, up and down. At times he was crazy with suspense. He listened at the closed door, and the tears ran down his face. The young wife was fighting bravely; hardly a groan escaped her; but the little noise cut his heart as with a knife-blade. He would hurry to the window and lean out into the night. Blood-red was that harvest moon! He watched it, and thought of the harvest in the far fields, and of the human harvest here.

As the night wore on, silence deepened and deepened. Suddenly, standing still, he seemed to feel the room full of a Presence, a Power: it swept about him: he was steeped in it. Was it God? Was it God at his mighty labors? Was it God creating new life on this planet?

Slowly went the hours; higher and higher climbed the blood-red moon; lower and lower it sank. He listened and waited; he walked; he tried to read; he flung down the book; he stood at the closed door; he pulled off his collar; he opened a deck of cards and tried to play solitaire. Nothing helped him; the Power was there, at work; he could not shake it off. Steeped in it was his soul. Oh, the divine mystery! Oh, miracle of reproduction—out of a seed a human being; out of a cell a Shakespeare or a Wagner; out of a microscopic particle such wonders as we are.

Awe filled him; and pity. A soft pity for women, who are called upon to bear the pain of the wonder, to pay with their agony for the miracle. A soft pity for the young wife, so young, so sweet, so happy. Why

did she have to suffer this night? He gazed out at the harvest moon, which shone unperturbed on the still and fruitful Earth.

All of the mystery of existence, the mystery of being a human being, of being born and of dying, went to his heart. He returned to the center of the room. He could not bear to be alone. He waited and watched, he listened, he stood at the closed door. Would the ordeal never be ended? How long must this last?

And then he leaned out again. The moon was gone. White and trembling arose the sweet dawn; birds were somewhere singing in the soft darkness; a smell of earth came to his nostrils on rising wind. Dawn! dawn was rising!

He stood back; a thrill went through his heart. He felt the time was at hand. And then suddenly in the silence rose a great cry—the cry of the Mother. He felt faint; he gasped; put his hand to his dripping forehead; cried out:

"God! God!"

And leaned on the back of a chair.

The door opened; the fat, red-faced mid-

wife came out. In her arms was something tiny, carefully wrapped. Frank was breathless, almost afraid. He stepped over. He spoke in an awed whisper:

"What is it?"

"It's a girl, Mr. Lasser."

A girl! He gazed down at the tiny face. It was real, it was living, it was his own baby, his own child. Suddenly his eyes swam in tears; he crumpled up in a chair, and sobbed, sobbed brokenly.

A little while later the midwife called him.

"She wants to see you a moment."

He staggered in; the tremulous light of dawn lay on the room; and in the bed the Mother with the sleeping babe in her arms. Frank leaned near, Edith smiled wanly.

"Father!" she whispered.

He thrilled and thrilled.

"Mother!"

Their lips met.

"Our baby," said Edith, "our little girl; our little daughter!"

What miracle is greater than this: to have a child?

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HARVEST

DOCTOR RAST had seen and heard nothing of Edith and Frank and had forgotten all about them. It was a crowded year and a half—there was much sickness with the changing seasons, and the months for him fled, too. Once or twice he had remembered that Frank was to return, but as no word came from him, he had let the matter drop. More important matters, people nearer and dearer to him, had to be attended to. Nell had often thought of Edith, inquired about her, and heard nothing. She had asked the Doctor, but he was ignorant as she. So she wondered in silence.

Then on a snowy Sunday afternoon Frank came in. The Doctor had been reading his medical journal, and his mind was

very busy. But when he flung back the door, and saw Frank, he woke sharply:

"You? Frank Lasser?"

"Yes. I want to see you."

"Come in."

Frank came into the cozy office, which was very white with the snow-light outside, and was very snug and warm. The Doctor noticed that Frank's face was drawn and touched by wrinkles. Frank slouched wearily into the office, and sat down in the armchair.

"Well," said the Doctor, "been away?"

"No."

"No? What then?"

"Don't you know? Haven't you heard?"

"No."

"I'm married!"

The Doctor felt a great shock smite his heart. He leaned nearer.

"Married?"

Frank smiled feebly.

"Yes, Doctor, I'm married."

The Doctor's face looked terrible at that moment—black and stern and forbidding.

"You married Edith, Frank?"

Frank spoke in a low voice:

"Yes—Edith." Then in self-defense. "I had to, Doctor. You don't understand, but I had to. I couldn't stand it. I took the risks. I had to marry her. I'm a human being. Anyway, I didn't believe what you told me."

The Doctor could not believe his own ears. He reproached himself bitterly for not having kept track of Edith. His heart seemed to be smothered.

"But at least tell me, Frank," he said with something of a sharp groan, "that you haven't any child."

Frank's voice came on a sob.

"No. I have a child."

The Doctor spoke with the edge of a knife-blade:

"Why didn't you call me in?"

"Oh—you—you see you made such a row——"

The Doctor broke in angrily:

"Then why do you come now?"

Frank said nothing.

"Why do you come?"

The young father spoke humbly, simply —from his heart:

"Doctor, my little girl; she's a month old. I want you to come and look at her—her eyes——"

The Doctor gave him a strange look. He spoke slowly, with a great effort, for he felt his heart tightening with dreadful pain:

"At the birth—did the doctor put drops in the child's eyes?"

Frank gasped, and looked frightened.

"Doctor? We had a midwife. No—she didn't do it. Why didn't you tell me this that night?"

The Doctor stifled a groan.

"Because you had no right to marry Edith. And you promised to come again. Frank," he raised his voice, he lifted his hands, "you went into this with eyes open."

Frank's lips parted. He spoke slowly, in a dead voice:

"Does this help now, Doctor? It's done; ain't it? Are you coming to see the kid?"

"Yes," said the Doctor quietly, "I'm coming."

Frank arose, bowed his head—he was a man humbled now—and spoke in a sob:

"I—I want to beg your pardon, Doctor. You'll never understand how it happened. But it did, and maybe—maybe I ought to be forgiven."

The Doctor rose with heart softened; he drew Frank close:

"I was only thinking of Edith, Frank! Come! We will go to her!"

He put on hat and coat and they stepped out into the soft white fall of snow. The fresh carpet on the pavement was black here and there with the indent of foot-prints, the red-brick houses had white sills and copings, the horse-cars came through a swirl of white and people hurried past muffled to the eyes. Autumn was gone; the winter of the earth had come. The Doctor walked close beside Frank.

"I want to tell you something," said Frank.

"Yes."

"About Edith."

"How is she?"

"Oh—she's not well."

"Gets dizzy?"

"Yes."

"Backache?"

"She's in pain all the time."

"Broken up?"

"She's not herself," his voice broke, "she's not what she used to be. She's not so beautiful any more."

Poor wild-rose! The Doctor's eyes filled. He spoke huskily:

"Does she know what's the matter with her?"

"No."

"Or the baby?"

"No."

The Doctor gripped Frank's arm:

"Then, Frank, you're going to do the manly thing. You're going to tell her. Otherwise she'll reproach herself—she'll think she had no right to marry—she'll think she's a burden on you."

Frank did not speak for a moment; but then the agony of the last month, the frightful remorse, the black hours, spoke in his voice:

"I'll do anything for Edith—anything in this world"—he went on bitterly—"now that it's too late."

The Doctor could say nothing. But as they rode uptown in silence he remembered the wild-rose of that enchanted April. Oh, the tragedy of life, the blighting of the blossoms, the crushing out of possibilities! Why did this have to be? His heart ached for the young mother. He longed to have superhuman power that he might set right the wrong of this world. He felt helpless and impotent. He felt as if he were rushing to the close of a ghastly tragedy. He felt as if all life broke in his hands and lay in ruins about him. With thoughts in a mad whirl, he climbed the three flights of stairs with Frank, and they walked into the pleasant parlor. At the window in a deep armchair, cushioned with a pillow, Edith was half lying. The Doctor stopped. His heart seemed twisted out of his breast. For was this the wild-rose? Was this sweet Edith—Edith of seventeen, laughing and blushing in early April? She was white-faced, thin, her eyes large and haunted by

pain and trouble, her forehead puckered and quick at twitching, her lips dry and pulled down over her teeth. But it was the eyes mainly — so large and mournful, ringed with darkness, and very patient. The Doctor felt as a father that looked down on his dead child. How could the Power of this world permit such a thing? Poor blighted wild-rose.

She looked up with surprise.

"Doctor!"

A flush of pleasure came to her cheeks.

"Edith! Edith!" he cried, clasping her hand; "Edith!"

"He's come to look at the baby," said Frank, twisting his derby through his hands.

Edith gave a low cry:

"The baby!" She tried to rise, and added sharply; "where's the baby—where is she? Oh!" She put her hand on her heart.

The baby was in the little crib beside her, quietly stirring its hands and feet.

The Doctor smiled sadly: "Edith! It's always good to watch a growing baby.

Frank's quite right. But how you've changed! What a woman you are!"

Tears sprang to her eyes.

"Oh, I don't know, Doctor," she said quietly, in a way that cut his heart. "I don't seem much of anything good."

She smiled piteously, and the Doctor could hardly see. So this was the end of the enchantment, the sweet girlhood, the sacred marriage. He tried with all his soul to comfort her.

"But you have a little living baby, Edith —that's worth every trouble, isn't it?"

"Ah," she said, with all the naiveness of a young mother, "did you ever see anything so sweet? Just look at her, just look! I watch her all day, my little Emily. I wish my mother could see her."

"Yes," murmured the Doctor, "yes."

Edith smiled piteously:

"Poor little thing! See how sore her eyes are." She leaned forward, pleadingly. "But it doesn't matter, does it? The midwife said they'd be all right in a few weeks, anyhow."

She gazed up at the Doctor, her eyes wide with question.

But the Doctor did not answer. He looked away, delaying almost instinctively the fatal moment. He felt as if he could not look. He felt as if he could not look. His pulse missed a beat, his blood surged up about his temples. Then, slowly, he leaned close over the crib. Frank came very near, slightly stooped, and watched with haggard eyes. The Doctor searchingly examined the tiny face. Then he slowly, and with shaking fingers drew the swollen lids apart, and looked in.

He stood up straight then, and all the pathos and tragedy of life seemed to go through him like a dreadful night. What could he say? What if this were his own child? He stood a moment looking down at Edith, his face lighted with struggling pity and love.

Edith spoke quaintly:

"Don't you think she's very, very lovely?"

The Doctor's voice was almost inaudible, and pure with divine tenderness.

"Yes. She is more lovely than ever I have seen in my life—Edith!"

"Yes, Doctor."

"You must be a good mother to her."

"Yes, Doctor."

"You must be twice a mother to her."

"Yes, Doctor."

"Because," he said slowly, "she needs you twice as much as other children need mothers."

Frank bowed his head to his doom. Edith's eyes changed strangely, filling with a wild light.

"What do you mean, Doctor?"

How soft his voice was, how tender:

"I mean—little Emily isn't like other children. She hasn't any pain, but it's a trouble just the same."

Edith felt lightning strike her; she sat forward.

"Doctor!—*Doctor!* Tell me what's the matter with the baby!"

He leaned, put a hand on her shoulder, and while his heart seemed to wither within him, spoke very gently:

"Edith—the baby is blind."

Edith rose up, rose straight up. She gave a wild, strangling cry:

"Blind? Blind? Emmy blind?—Good God! Good God!"

She leaped to the crib, the Doctor making way for her, she snatched up the child, and stared at it.

"Emmy blind? Good God! My heart! My heart! Emmy!"

The little one whimpered plaintively. Then slowly—a weird and terrible sight—the mother passed her finger before the baby's eyes, fluttered the ribbon of her sleeve above the tiny face, stared nearer and nearer like one possessed. Suddenly she put the child down, stretched out her arms, and shrieked. It was a cry as when the child was born. Frank sank on a chair, groaning. The Doctor seized her arms, and whispering, "Edith! Edith!" pushed her into the chair again. She leaned forward staring at the Doctor. He stood, eyes half-closed, and pain and pity on his face.

"Edith," he said quietly, "think how Emmy needs you—and will always need you!"

Edith clenched her fist, looked up, and shook it.

"God," she cried hoarsely, "you punished us—we were too happy. I hate you, God, I hate you. Make a baby blind! I hate you!"

Was it the wild-rose speaking?

Then in the awful silence, Frank arose. The time had come; the great moment had arrived. His face was ashen, writhing with agony. He began in a low voice:

"No, Edith, it wasn't God. It was a human being. Maybe it usually is. It was I, Edith."

The Doctor looked at him sharply. The dreadful words fell on Edith's torn heart, and she gasped.

"You?"

"Yes," he went on quietly, "I. Before I married you I sowed my wild oats. I went around with women. And then I got into trouble. I went to the Doctor and he told me not to marry for a while. He told me what might happen—about you" his voice broke—"and the baby. I honestly meant to

tell you and go away. That's why I went up to the country to see you."

Edith breathed sharply, the revelation pouring light into her mind.

"Edith," he stood sobbing, "what could I do? Do you remember? How could I help having you? Oh, I was so sure the Doctor was mistaken! I was so sure I was all right. Edith!" he cried sharply; "I loved you too much, and now," his shoulders wrenched coarse sobs, "what have I done? What have I done?"

He threw up his hands, sank at her feet, buried his head in her lap.

"Mother! Mother! I ought to be killed! Forgive me! Forgive me!"

Edith looked from side to side, and kept moistening her lips.

And then the Doctor's voice came, came as if he could not speak for utter love:

"Children—Edith, Frank. What's done is done. And the worst has been done that can be. Take up your lives as they are, and use them well. There is still love—you have one another. Make up for your losses with more love, purer love; for in

our poor human world that is the only healer. Oh, give each other that, give each other much of that"

He paused.

"Edith"—he leaned near—"love him enough to forgive him. He has made a clean breast of it. He loved you enough for that."

Edith did not stir.

"Edith—he is your husband."

Again there was silence, and the Doctor spoke sweetly:

"As for that little child—much can be done. And possibly in the years to come little new children will laugh in this house, play about here on the floor, cling to your knees. Oh, take up your lives, take them up, and go on to what human glories there are. Frank—Edith!"

Again there was silence.

"Edith."

"Yes."

"Forgive him, even as a mother forgives her only child."

Then suddenly Edith lifted the low head, lifted it, put her arms out and drew his

body toward her, and kissed and kissed his face, and both sobbed brokenly, heart-brokenly together.

"Edith!"

"Frank!"

"Oh," she sobbed, "Frank—husband—why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you trust me?"

"Mother," he cried, "forgive me!"

"Ah," she murmured, "what else can I do? I need you—I need you so much!"

"Edith!" Then he spoke low: "Hereafter I will never hide anything."

The Doctor murmured gently:

"Now, indeed, you are truly married. Now you are man and wife."

And he passed out into the storm. And as he wiped at his eyes he muttered:

"When will the young men understand?"

And then again:

"Yes—the women—they always get the raw end of the deal."

And up in the little parlor into two broken hearts the first rays of perfect mar-

riage stole, not without a touch of glory, not without a touch of victory.

But the little blind baby said nothing, but lay there. Blighted was our wild-rose, our sweet Seventeen; sightless her first-born. The sowing was of wild oats; and this was the harvest.

THE END.

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